

***Castlemaine***

**An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)**

**by**

**Lauren Letsinger**

**Thesis Advisor**

**Jean Amman**

**Ball State University**

**Muncie, Indiana**

**July 2010**

**Expected Date of Graduation**

**July 24, 2010**

***Castlemaine***

**An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)**

**by**

**Lauren Letsinger**

**Thesis Advisor**

**Jean Amman**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jean Amman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'J' and 'A'.

**Ball State University**

**Muncie, Indiana**

**July 2010**

**Expected Date of Graduation**

**July 24, 2010**

SpColl  
Undergrad.  
Thesis  
LD  
2489  
.Z4  
2010  
L48

### Abstract

Tessa, an American girl from Indiana, finds herself plunging head first into the mysterious past and culture of Australia when her Nana passes away and leaves her house in Castlemaine, Victoria to their family. Already worried about school and her new crush Mason, Tessa starts seeing ghosts of a poor Irish miner and his forbidden love, the mine owner's daughter. While learning that Australia had the biggest gold rush in history, Tessa begins to uncover a mystery with the help of her ghostly visions and a deadly gold-digging scheme over 150 years in the making. What will a person do for love? Is love stronger than greed?

This piece's origins are drawn directly from first-hand experiences in Castlemaine and across the entire country of Australia. Almost all of the places and tales throughout the piece are real.

Experience and learn about Australia's ghostly and gold mining past and culturally rich present with Tessa and her family in *Castlemaine*.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Jean Amman for her patience and advice. Her help and positive encouragement really inspired me and kept me going through this difficult task. I really appreciate all the time she spent tediously proofreading my work. Thanks to her, the finished piece is polished and entertaining.

I would like to thank David Wilson and Karen and Richard Yates for their insight to Australian culture and for showing me the country. I would specifically like to thank David for helping me work out the plot and grammatical errors, as well as always encouraging me.



## PREFACE/AUTHOR STATEMENT

As an Honors College student, I decided to challenge myself by choosing a thesis topic outside my major field of study. I am a double major in Biology and Pre-Med and have been accepted to The Ohio State's Pharmacy School for Fall 2010, but I wanted to try my hand at creative writing. The storyline itself came from my first-hand experience in Australia. During the summer of 2009, I traveled around the country. The majority of the trip was spent in the southern state of Victoria in a small town called Castlemaine, hence the title of piece. (See Photo 1.) My trip was not part of a study abroad program, so I did not see the "tourist" side of Australia, but the real, everyday culture. The places, "fun facts," and other cultural tidbits are all first-hand accounts of my experiences. The easiest way to describe the culture was through an American point of view, so that's why the main character is a young girl from Indiana.

The intended audience is those American readers with interests in mystery, romance, thrillers, travel, ghosts, and history. If someone does not like one genre they may like another. By incorporating so many different elements into one tale, I have opened the door to introduce a broad range of people to Australian culture and history. The characters, the vessels that tell the story, are average people with whom anyone could draw personal connections.

The names of the characters in the story have historical significance. Mick Malley and Cian (pronounced Kee-an, a predecessor to Sean) and Nolan O'Macy are Irish immigrant miners. Their names were popular in Ireland during the 1850's, around the time of their birth, but are still popular today. Lillian Odessa and Cassius Taylor are upper-middle-class English immigrants. Their names, especially Cassius and Odessa, are extremely accurate to the time period, rank, and location. I chose Nolan and Lilly as the main character's names because they are still quite common today, making the characters easier to relate to the audience. Mason and Mike Malley are Mick Malley's descendents that still live in Castlemaine in the story. Their names all start with M's to help the reader draw a connection between the "bad guy" in the 1875 story line and the "bad guy" in the modern story line before their actual connection is revealed. Tessa and Ben Wilson's names are average Midwestern names of today, thus making both of them very relatable to any audience. I chose not to give Mom a name in the story. The story is told from Tessa's point of view. Tessa does think her mother is a little quirky, but still has a loving relationship with her. Generally, girls that are close with their parents do not call them by their first names, so Tessa never reveals Mom's first name.

Food was a huge part of my experience in Australia. The price shock hits the minute you enter the country. A gallon of milk is literally four to six dollars, with the exchange rate almost dollar to dollar. Frosted Flakes, called Frosties. (See Photo 2), are imported and are the most expensive cereal on the shelf, almost twelve dollars a box. The cereals are generally not sugar-coated like American cereal, but contain a lot of granola. I referred to it then as "bird seed", but they were very tasty! Bakeries are very popular. The main items found at a bakery are not pastries, but meat pies. Meat pies are a staple food, popular at sporting events, dinner time, snack time and even parties as hors d'oeuvres. Fish and chips are another staple meal, brought over with the English immigrants and served classically on old newspapers. Tessa and her family try out both of these main dishes in the story. Tessa also lives through



her first run-in with price shock at the grocery store. The names of items like milk, cheese, biscuits, and lunch meat are all true. She has no idea what items to choose, so she sticks with names that sound familiar. I had the same trouble throughout my entire trip. Learning to cook was the hardest part about living in Australia because of the strange names of food and the difference in availability and cost of those items.

Australia Rules Football, aside from cricket and rugby, is one of the most popular sports, especially in Victoria where it originated. It is a cross between soccer, football, and rugby. Mason mentions his love for the sport upon his first encounter with Tessa at Castlemaine Senior College. This is to show its importance and the love of sporting competition in the lives of Victorians and all Australians.

All of the places mentioned in the story are real places that I visited during my trip. Castlemaine Senior College, the school that Tessa and Mason attend, is just as it's described in the story. The campus is more like an American college, where different subjects have their own separate buildings. Because it's normally warm year round, it's comfortable to walk outside between classes. Mom gets a new job at the doctor's office next to the Botanical Gardens. I caught a bug during the trip and saw a doctor at that particular clinic. The grocery store, where Tessa encounters the high prices, is the Castlemaine IGA (Independent Grocers of Australia). My boyfriend, a Castlemaine native, worked at the grocery store throughout high school. He attended Castlemaine Senior College. The hotel that Tessa and her family stay at until their house is ready is located in the center of town for long-term residents. I did not have the opportunity to tour the building, but I did drive past it almost daily. The description of the hotel is as I imagine it to look.

Lilly and Nolan's secret meeting place, Turpins Falls, was one of my favorite places on my tour. (See Photos 3-5.) The falls are completely isolated in the middle of grassland. I took several pictures of Turpins, plus it held a special place in my heart, so it was easy to accurately describe it. I chose this place to be Lilly and Nolan's secret place because of its sense of romance and isolation. It's so beautiful, it is easy to be swept up in the moments that the scenery creates and lose track of time.

The Pennyweight Cemetery was another favorite on the tour and started my obsession with the ghost stories associated with Australia's history. (See Photos 6-8.) The Pennyweight Cemetery is an actual children's cemetery used by miners from the Victorian Gold Rush. Some of the graves have gravestones; others are just outlined by broken pieces of quartz. Those with engraved names and dates tell sad stories of infants that lived just a few days, to toddlers and young children that suffered from accidents and disease. Graves marked only by quartz outlines tell equally sad tales as those with words. The outlines of the graves are so small; it breaks your heart to imagine a parent burying someone so small and innocent. The cemetery is no longer used by current residents. It has a newer fence, probably put up in the 1940's, and a nice plaque with its history written on it.

The ghost stories began with my trip to the Pennyweight Cemetery. My boyfriend and I walked around the cemetery while he told me the same story that Mason tells Tessa. The woman that lives across the street from the cemetery sees a young girl on her swing set in the back yard. The name of the woman was changed for the story, but the ghost sighting is true to life.



When I mentioned this story to a group at dinner, a plethora of ghost stories sprang up. Everyone seems to have had some encounter with ghosts. Most of the ghosts in Victoria are from the mining era. However, in Tasmania, where prisoners were first taken to Australia upon its discovery, ghosts of old prisoners and townspeople are seen. The rule about reporting sightings is true. If three separate, unrelated people see the same ghost three separate, unrelated times, the ghost sighting can be reported as a true ghost sighting. Thus, the stories going around are not tall tales, but true accounts.

A main theme in the story is the Victorian Gold Rush. The gold rush officially began in 1851 when Louis Michel discovered gold about 15 miles outside of Melbourne. Gold is still being excavated today, but with newer technology. Miners would often start by panning for gold in river beds, but quickly realized that they could find just as much if not more gold beneath the surface. The “holes” that Tessa runs through and constantly sees are test holes that miners used to look for quartz. (See Photos 9-10.) When you start to see test holes that are frequent and close together, it means that they found a vein of quartz and gold in that location. Those areas could be several square miles with only a foot or two between holes. This makes it very dangerous for someone to walk through. The debris that fell on top over the past hundred and fifty years makes the holes hard to see. A few careless tourists die each year from falling in holes. Because the population in the mining towns died down after the initial gold rush, it seemed pointless for the few remaining people to fill in the billions upon billions of holes. It just made more sense to move to an undisturbed area to build their lives.

In Ballarat, which was once the richest mining town in the country, I was able to visit an 1850's-style mining town open for tourist to learn about the history. I learned the basic process of mining, town life and how to pan for gold. (See Photo 11.) I also heard the story of The Welcome Stranger and other large nugget discoveries. (See Photos 12-13.) These stories enrich the piece with culture and interest.

Although the inspiration for the story was drawn from my personal experience, the details are not consistent with real life. Not all of the locations in the tale are exact. I did consult the town map, but for the sake of the plot, some of the locations were changed, such as the Pennyweight Cemetery and Turpins Falls. Turpins Falls is in a different town that is not within walking distance to Castlemaine. It would have been a very long walk for Lilly and Nolan to meet had I not relocated it. Another inconsistency is Tessa's ability to enter the country at all. It would have taken many months to many years to get a visa to enter the country, let alone to gain citizenship to stay. For time's sake, I had to leave out any legal issues preventing Tessa's family from having a hasty move.

By using my own experience and research to fill in the gaps, I created a way to share Australian culture and history through an interesting, relatable story. The experience of writing this piece added another skill to my bag of tricks. I hope that audiences with all different tastes, interests, and ages can enjoy the thrill, romance, culture and mystery of this story. After having just a taste of the basic outline, friends and family members in America and Australia expressed interest in reading the finished piece. In the future, I would like to expand the story, making it a full-length novel and present it to a publisher. I attempted to make the story line as theatrical as possible, in hopes that a feature film could also blossom. I thoroughly enjoyed writing this story and hope that future readers enjoy reading it as much as I did writing it.



Photo 1- Map of Victoria (Castlemaine highlighted in purple)

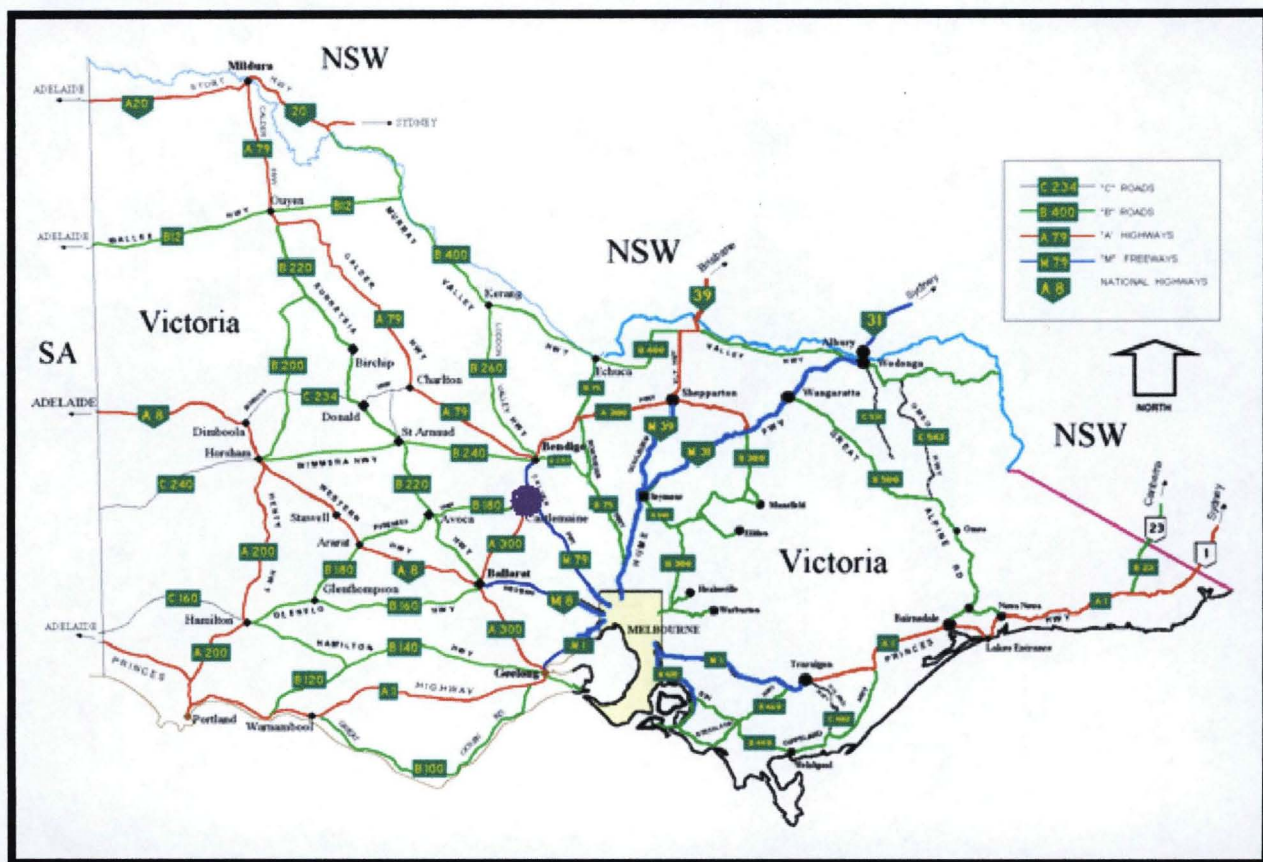
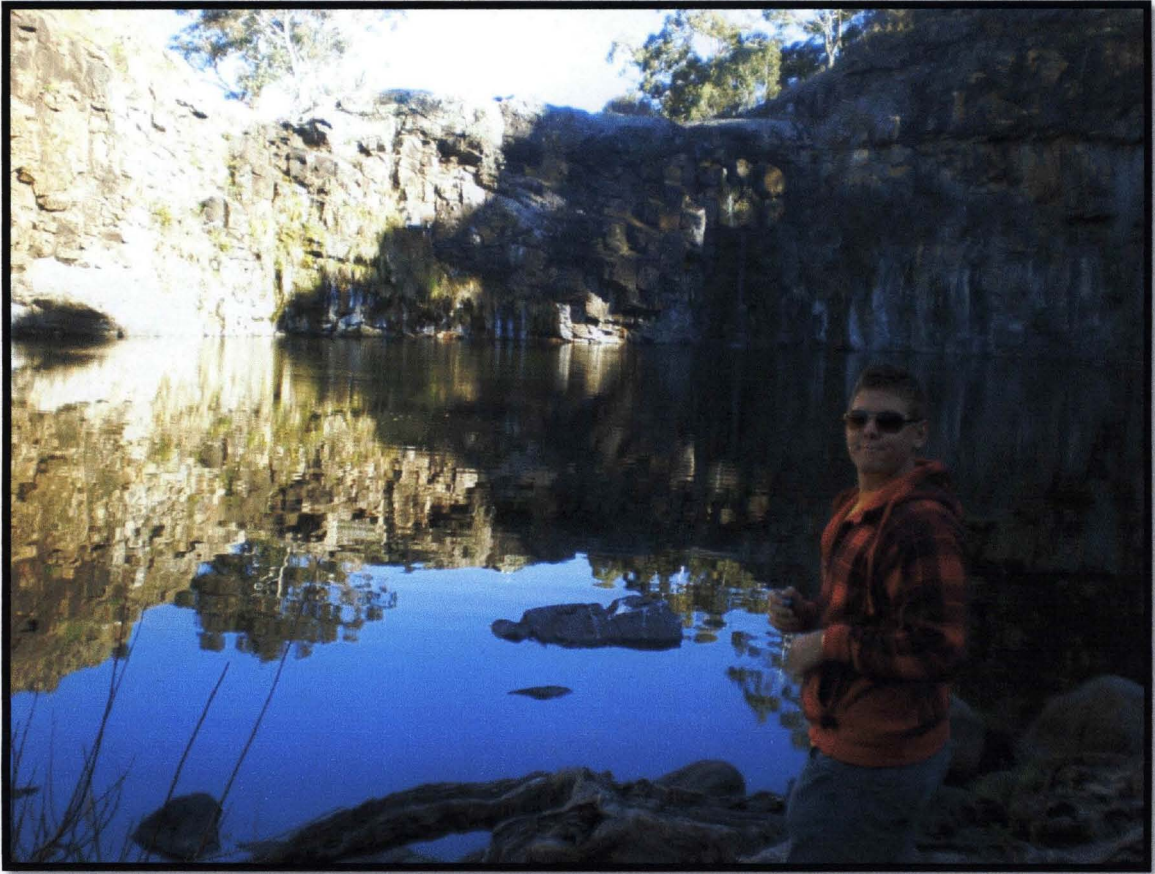


Photo 2- Frosties cereal

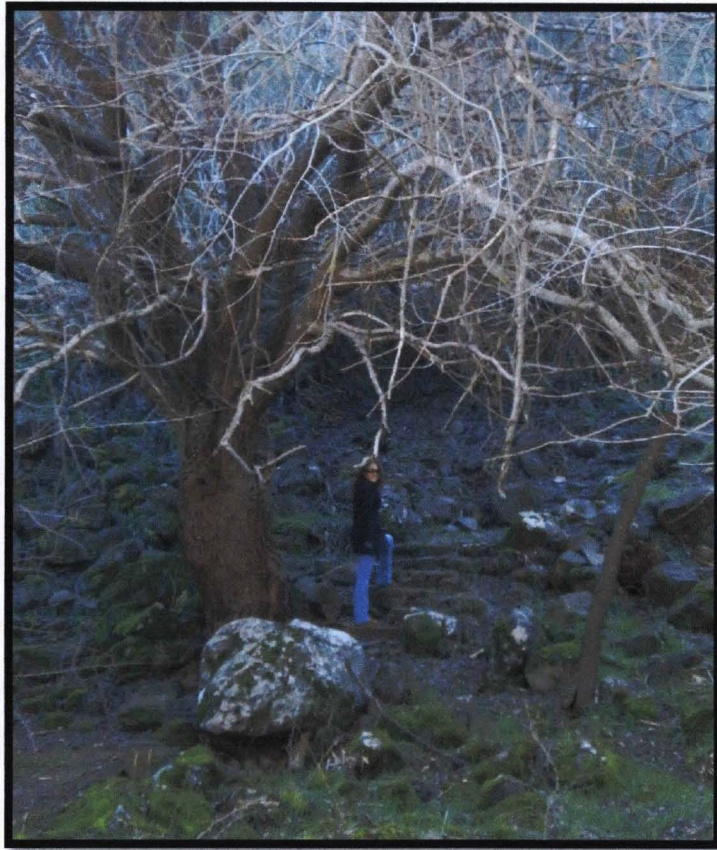




Photos 3-5: Turpins Falls, Lilly and Nolan's secret meeting place







Photos 6-8: Pennyweight Cemetery

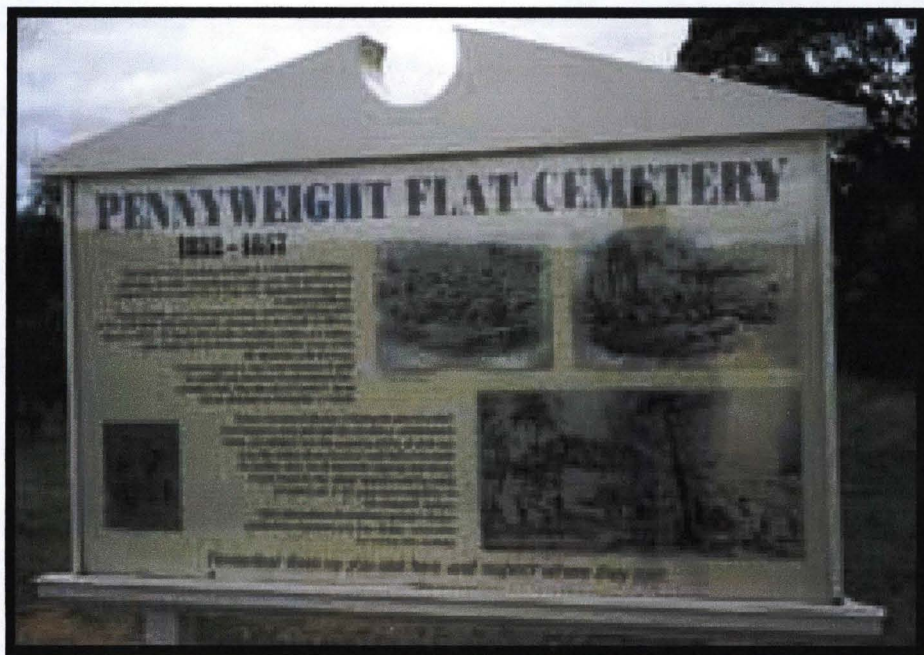








Photo 9-10: Test holes just outside the town of Castlemaine; Deep Test hole with original wood beams

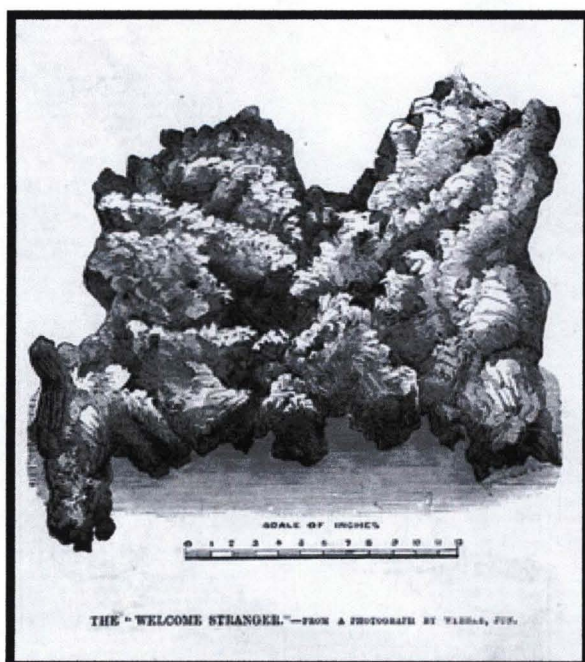




Photo 11: Panning for gold at Ballarat



Photo 12-13: The Welcome Stranger, largest nugget ever found, sketch and replica







# CASTLEMAINE

By: Lauren Letsinger

## CHAPTER 1

“Tipton, IN- Noelle (Kat) Katherine Wilson, 67, passed away in her home following an extended illness.

Kat was born on March 11, 1940, in Melbourne, Australia, to Barbara and Anthony Amiles. She met and married her husband of 45 years, Simon Wilson, and moved to Tipton, IN in 1960. Survivors include her daughter, Nancy, 40, and two sons, Brad, 43, and Samuel, 45, and grandchildren Maggie, 22, Evan, 20, Jeff, 20, Jackson, 19, Teresa, 17, and Ben, 11.

Funeral services will be held Monday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007, at the Young-Nichols Funeral Home on Jefferson Street.”

*I never knew Nana’s name was Noelle. That must have been where Mom got mine from. Nicknames are ridiculous. Why don’t parents just name their kids the name they know they’re going to call them? Maybe it’s so you know you’re in trouble. I only get the full name when I’m in trouble. I hate it. I like Tessa better,* Tessa thought to herself as she read her grandmother’s obituary.

She looked around at her room and started to prioritize what she would miss and what she wouldn’t. Her 4<sup>th</sup> place gymnastics trophy from middle school she would miss, but it couldn’t go. It would take up too much room. Mom had said only three bags. Everything else they would buy when they got there. Summer clothes, the essential shoes, pictures, home movies, her computer, and some childhood memories were all that could fit into her three bags. She thought that Mom might consider getting a storage space until they could bring more of their things over.

“TESSA TESSA TESSA TESSA TESSA TESSA TESSA TES-,” Ben screamed as he ran around her room knocking everything off her bed.

“What do you WANT???”

“Mom says you have to start bringing all your stuff downstairs to the garage so she can price it.”

“I’m not ready yet.”

“But MOM SAID!”

“FINE!” Ben walked out with a smirk on his face.

“Hey, Benny! Wanna go to the South Pole for ice cream one more time before Mom sells our bikes?”

Ben ran back in and hugged his sister. He was very excited about the move, but Tessa was indifferent. To him, Australia was an action-packed adventure filled with snakes that could kill him, giant spiders, and croc wrestling. To Tessa, it felt like just another place to exist. She was happy enough in Tipton, but it had always felt like something was missing, like she was meant for something more than bike rides to the South Pole and serving pizza at the Pizza Shack.

Dad had been a shadow in Tessa's memory since she was four. The divorce and Dad's new job put Tessa with her Mom in Tipton and Dad in Seattle at work. Mom had remarried with Stan, which had worked for a few more years, and then Ben was born. Shortly after, Mom found herself raising two kids alone. Tessa and Ben loved it that way. Tessa's dad had visited once every couple of years when she was younger, but she hadn't seen him since she was 13. Ben's dad was not allowed to visit. Mom worked at Marsh Supermarkets, and Tessa and Ben had shared a fun childhood out in the cornfields of Indiana.

When Marsh Supermarkets had been bought out by a competitor a few months before, Mom had lost her job. Then Nana passed away. Mom was contacted a few days after Nana's death by a lawyer wanting to speak to her about a will. Reluctant as Mom was, she had met with the lawyer. She didn't think Nana really had anything to leave for her. But she was shocked to learn what Nana actually had in store. Nana had apparently inherited her own childhood home in Australia when Mom's Nana passed away. Mortgage payments and other bills had started to pile up, so Mom decided that the Wilson family was moving to Castlemaine.

Three days after the monster garage sale, a taxi driver knocked at the door. He helped Mom load everything into the trunk. Nine bags—that's all they took. Tessa looked around her room once more. Empty. Like she had never even been there.

"Tess! Come on, sweetie. We'll be late for our flight!" Mom shouted.

"We're going to the land down under!" she could hear Ben singing outside. She smiled and ran downstairs.

"I'm going to miss it, too," Mom said softly and gave Tessa a one-armed hug.

"Everybody say 'GOODBYE, HOUSE!'"

In the taxi, Mom made Ben and Tessa double-check that they had everything. Tessa glared at her passport.

"You look like an alien in that picture, Tessy!" Ben said and laughed.

"MOM!"

"Let me see." Mom grabbed the passport and looked at her photo. "I think you look very pretty! Just like Nana."

Tessa had dirty strawberry blonde, curly hair. It was long and reached about halfway down her back. Mom said she had gotten it from Dad, but her eyes had come straight from Nana. Her eyes were a bright blue, the same color as the sky when it's so bright you need sunglasses. Her skin was always tan. That had come from Nana, too. It was the Aussie in her. She was a very attractive girl. A couple of boys at school had asked her to the movies, and she always had a date to the dances, although she never had had a boyfriend.

"Let me see!" Ben ripped the passport out of Mom's hands. "I miss Nana. I can't wait to see her house! I bet it's huge and has crocs that live in the basement!"

"You know, Nana didn't really talk about her childhood. I remember her saying to Pap once that it was too scary and she didn't want to go back. Pap said that she was just seeing things. Maybe the house is haunted! BoOoOoOoO!" Mom said and tickled Ben.

"Here we are. Let me help you with your luggage. The fare is 35 dollars, and you can pay with cash or card. No checks, please," the taxi driver said.

Tessa walked up with Mom to the check-in counter. The young man behind the counter kept smiling at Tessa. She smiled back, but just to humor him. Ben stayed off to the side and guarded the luggage.

"Here are your boarding passes. Will you be checking any luggage today?" the man asked.

"Yes, we have six bags to check. Ben! Can you bring over all our big bags? Thank you!" Mom responded.

"The first two bags are 30 dollars and every bag after is 45. But since you have so many bags, I went ahead and gave you the employee discount," the man said and smiled up at Tessa.

Tessa did not look amused. Mom nudged her hip into Tessa's side.

"Thank you! That is so generous of you! Isn't it, Tessa?" Mom looked at Tessa wanting a real "thank-you" smile for the young man. She obliged.

"Wow! What a long trip you have ahead of you! Indy to Atlanta to LA to Melbourne! Two whole days! Are you touring?" the young man asked.

"Actually, we're moving there," Mom answered.

"Well, I wish you the best of luck, Ma'am...Tessa," he said with one more smile before they went to the gate.



## CHAPTER 2

Two days on a tiny airplane and two hours in a tiny rental car were all Tessa could stand. Less than two minutes after dumping her things in the Colonial Motel & Apartments, she ran out the door to explore the town. It was getting dark, and the heat was dry. An excitement unfamiliar to Tessa swept over her body. Everything she saw had sharper corners, brighter colors, louder noises, and stronger scents. The slightest breeze touched her, and she felt the tingle up and down her spine.

Tessa headed down Barker Street and searched for Lyttleton Street. She wanted to see Nana's house. Nana was more than just an average grandma, at least to Tessa. To Tessa, Nana was the solid backbone of her existence. Mom had never been too stable or organized, and Ben was your everyday annoying little brother, but Nana made Tessa make sense. Tessa wasn't like Mom, and she sure wasn't like her dad. Tessa was like Nana. She was down to earth, full of adventure, and she had inspired that in Tessa as well. When Nana died, part of Tessa had gone with her. Tessa had let out a deep breath, and with that, her life had slowed down and started to matter less. The move and Nana's death had whisked away Tessa's sense of purpose. But just as easily as her purpose blew away on her breath, it was renewed again when she breathed in this new place. Tessa felt like this was Nana's last gift to give to her.

At last she saw it in the twilight. The big, old white house stood there and smiled at her. The smile was sly and held secrets Tessa couldn't wait to uncover. Nana had always kept the key under a rock at the back door. Old habits die hard. Tessa found the key to this house under a rock right next to the back door.

Tessa slowly walked into the creaky, old house. The main entrance was directly opposite the back door. She took three steps and saw a huge frame covered in a sheet hanging on the wall next to a grand staircase. She held her breath to keep from inhaling the dust as she pulled away the sheet. It was a mirror. Just as she started to look at her reflection, a chill ran down her spine. Her heightened senses began to get the best of her. She quickly exited the house, locked it, and replaced the key.

Tessa lightly jogged back to the hotel. Mom and Ben were not surprised to see her when she arrived. They acted as if she had never left.

"Honey, you should start heading to bed soon! You have your first day of school tomorrow! Ben, off to bed now," Mom instructed.

"BUT MOM! Tessa gets to stay up!" Ben complained.

"Tessa is older, and we're going to have girl time before bed," Mom answered. Ben reluctantly dragged his feet to the bed he was sharing with Mom. Mom signaled to Tessa to walk upstairs to the loft where Tessa was sleeping.

"You okay, sweetie?" Mom asked.

"I'm fine."

“Tessa-.”

“Mom, I’m fine. A little overwhelmed is all.”

“It’s a lot for one day. Just clear your thoughts and get excited for school tomorrow! I bet there are going to be lots of cute boys. With accents! And you will be the talk of the school. New beautiful American girl!”

“Good night, Mom!” Tessa laughed. Her mom could always make her laugh.

Mom turned off the light and went back down the stairs to get ready for bed. Tessa could hear Ben lightly snoring. She smiled, took a deep breath, and started to actually worry about school the next day.

*I haven’t gone to a new school since kindergarten. What if I don’t make any friends? What if they make fun of me? What if I can’t find my classrooms? Hopefully there will be cute boys. I can’t wait. . . .*

.....

Tessa walked to school the first day. Not too many cars were in the parking lot. Maybe thirty. This was either a small school, or most people walked just as she had. The campus of Castlemaine Senior College was outside, unlike American schools that are completely under one roof. The entire campus lay on the side of a hill and was surrounded by a high metal fence. The fence was in need of repair. Tessa laughed to herself because it would keep no one out that had a pulse and two legs. There were two large sports fields at the bottom of the hill. Both fields were oval; however, one had a strip of dirt in the center and the other had four large poles at each end. Whatever sports were played there, Tessa had never heard of them before. A two-story classroom stood next to the field with the poles and was connected to the main office via a bridge. Tessa walked into the office to get her schedule and any additional information she needed.

The scheduling was much different than in her school back in Tipton. In Tipton, there had been seven periods every day, and every day was the same. Here, each day she had a different schedule. There were five periods a day. Some days she had the same class for two periods and other classes for the remaining three. Although every day had a different schedule, it evened out that each class received five periods throughout the week. Twelfth-year students were permitted to leave campus during the lunch period. She thought she might check out the local restaurants.

While walking to her first class in satellite building B, she soaked in the sights. There was an outdoor cafeteria with a seating area, several small satellite classrooms, a gymnasium, and another two-story building at the top of the hill. As she was looking around, she noticed a boy with dark red hair staring at her from the cafeteria. She quickly looked behind her to make sure he wasn’t looking at anyone else. The boy’s stare became more intense.



*"He is so staring at me! It's not even subtle. Oh my God! He is so gorgeous,"* Tessa thought. The boy's dark red hair had highlights of amber that reflected off its slight waves from the sun. His dark brown eyes contrasted with his perfectly white smile that he offered to Tessa as he stared. A male friend of his said something to him to bring him back into the conversation. He turned to him and declined, patting his friend on the shoulder before leaving his company. Tessa could see his muscles under his tan skin and dark grey shirt while he gathered his backpack. He walked in what seemed like slow motion in Tessa's direction.

"Hi. I'm Mason. How are you going? Are you new here?" Mason asked her. "What's your name?"

"I...I..." Tessa stuttered. *"Please say something, Tessa!"* she begged her mouth. Mason looked at the top of her schedule.

"So, Teresa, what brings you to Castlemaine?"

"It's Tessa," Tessa finally sputtered. *Thank God.* "I just moved here to my grandma's house from America."

"Is that right? That's all right 'ey? Welcome to Australia, mate. Your first class is in satellite B? I can show you the route."

"Thanks," Tessa answered. *I already know where it is. I can read a map. Who cares, Tessa? He is so perfect.* The pair began slowly walking towards her classroom.

"Would you want to meet me at the canteen for lunch?"

"What's a canteen?"

Mason laughed. His laugh mesmerized her. It didn't even occur to her to be embarrassed at her lack of knowledge. She was completely hypnotized by his laugh. "Mate, the canteen is where you get food. You do have places to eat in America?" and he laughed again.

"Yes...yes, we do. We call them cafeterias back home," Tessa answered with a "please-feel-guilty" stare.

"Aw, don't have a teary, mate. I didn't mean to make you homesick. How about I show you around this weekend? Make you feel a bit more at home, 'ey?" Mason offered her exactly what she wanted.

"Sure, that sounds great!" *Was that too much enthusiasm? Can he tell I'm in love with him?*

"Well, here's my number, but I'll still be seeing you for lunch, right?" He handed her a little torn bit of paper with a number on it.

"I don't have a phone yet. I should be getting one tomorrow. I can give you a call when I get settled in tomorrow?"

"Sounds great, babe."

*He called me babe.* Tessa let out a sigh that ended in a huge smile.

"See you at lunch," Mason said.

Tessa's mind was in the clouds the entire morning and through most of lunch with Mason. She smiled and stared into his dark brown eyes of perfection. His accent was incredibly attractive. He talked about what each teacher was like and how the AFL season was going. His team was winning, and he couldn't be happier. He mentioned something or other about players she had never heard of. She just kept on smiling and nodding. After lunch and weekend plans were confirmed with Mason, Tessa floated through her two afternoon periods and her walk home.

Tessa gently closed the hotel door behind her and was immediately greeted by her mom.

"I bought a car! Yea! Wanna take it for a spin with me, Tess?" Mom almost shouted with excitement.

"Wow, Mom! You have been so busy today!"

"I know, right? Come see it! BEN! Wanna go for a ride?"

"MOM!! I'm playing my gameboy!"

"Ok, bud! Just asking. Let's go! I'll teach you how to drive on the other side of the road! Well, we can teach each other. I'm not that good at it yet either."

Mom and Tessa barely made a few laps around the hotel and called it quits. Mom was terrible, but Tessa caught on quickly. She was starting to feel like she belonged.

.....

"Can you please run down to the grocery store and pick up some milk, pancake mix, cereal, paper plates, plastic forks, bread, lunchmeat, and cheese?" Mom asked Tessa. Tessa was more than happy to oblige. She wanted to see more of the town.

"Can you write it down, Mom?" asked Tessa.

"Can I go? Please please please, Tessy!!" Ben pleaded.

"No."

"M-O-O-O-O-O-M-M-M-M! TESSA WON'T LET ME G-," Ben screamed.

"BENGIMAN! Just for that you are staying here with me. Besides, I need someone to figure out how to work this DVD player. I can't figure out the cords," Mom said. Mom had never been good with technology, but she was so creative. Whenever she was missing, she could always be found at the Hobby Lobby or in her bedroom cooking up some new craft idea that always turned out beautiful and awe-inspiring. However, she couldn't preheat an oven or turn on a computer without Ben and Tessa's



help. She had once tried an electric potato masher that she had received as a Christmas gift. The countertop started to smoke, and the home security system had called the fire department out to the house. Dinner was put off due to the excitement and resulted in another night eating out at the Jim Dandy. She had always said that she just repelled technology, which made Tessa laugh. Tonight it made Ben mad.

"I don't WANNA fix the stupid DVD player! Make Tessa do it!"

"That is ENOUGH out of you. Tessa, here is 20 dollars. This should be enough. Let me know if it's not. Just call me on the cell. My number is programmed into your phone," Mom instructed. "Here's the list!"

If technology was Greek to Mom, organization was her first language. She never missed a beat. The phone numbers just proved that even in a foreign country Mom still had brought her "A game."

Tessa didn't have any trouble finding the grocery store. There was only one in town. She parked the car and walked in. The front of the store was separated from the actual grocery store, unlike the American stores she was used to. The front section included a separate bakery, a separate flower shop, and a separate liquor store. The rest of the grocery store could be entered through the rotating silver "people-counter" like at movie theaters and theme parks.

It was chilly, but Tessa was thankful to get out of the heat. She walked towards the frozen foods aisle. The milk was at the back of the store on the far left. There was full cream and skim.

*Where is the 1% and 2% and Vitamin D milk? Who only has two kinds of milk? What the heck is full cream? That sounds nasty!* Tessa thought to herself. She chose the only familiar milk: skim. Ben didn't care for skim milk, but she knew when she would tell him it was between milk called "full cream" or skim, he'd appreciate her choice.

"Milk. Check. Next is cheese. Should be near the milk," Tessa whispered to herself. She found the cheese. All of it was the same color: light yellow. Nothing was sliced. Only ricotta was labeled, and it was sold in plastic bowls. The rest of the cheese was just called "mild cheese." It came shredded or in blocks.

"Great. First milk, now cheese." Tessa grabbed the mild cheese block. "Cheddar comes in mild back home. Maybe they mean cheddar."

Fortunately the sliced meats were next to the cheeses, and they were properly labeled although the selection was limited to turkey, lamb, beef, and ham. She began to move to the cereal aisle in the center of the store. She saw a sign saying "BISCUITS, CEREALS, CONFECTIONERY."

"Biscuits? They must really love biscuits to have an entire aisle dedicated to them! Confectionery must be candy. I've heard that word before."

There were no biscuits to be found in the biscuit aisle. It was full of crackers and cookies, cereal and all kinds of candy.

Then she recognized Tony the Tiger from Frosted Flakes. The box was almost emitting light as a beckon of familiarity. Tessa was magnetically drawn to it. The cereal looked exactly the same, but it was called "Frosties" instead of Frosted Flakes. The Rice Krispies were next to it and labeled "Rice Bubbles." Tessa saw a yellow sale sign under the box.

"Frosties ON SALE: \$11.50."

Tessa heart stopped, and she started to sweat. A box of cereal could not cost eleven dollars. She power-walked back to the milk and cheese section. The milk was six dollars, and the cheese was eight dollars. Mom had given her only twenty dollars! Tessa knew Mom didn't have much money as it was. Food alone would bankrupt them! The new cell phone was ready to make an emergency call home.

"Hello?" Mom answered.

"MOM!"

"What, honey? Are you ok?"

"Mom, the cereal is eleven dollars. FROSTED FLAKES ARE ELEVEN DOLLARS!"

"Calm down, sweetie. The prices are different over here. It's okay. Just put it on your debit card, and I'll repay you when you get home. Don't worry," Mom reassured her.

"Okay. I'll be home soon." Tessa was not relieved. She was frozen with price shock. She quickly went back through the list of items. Bread and pancake mix. She found them with ease. She kept a tally of the prices in her head so she could discard the most expensive non-essential item. The Frosties had to go. It was sad but true.

Tessa walked up to the check-out lane and handed the lady her card. The total was 45 dollars.

After a struggle with the credit card machine not reading the American card, the clerk finally succeeded, and Tessa made her way out to the parking lot with her one tiny bag of groceries and the three-liter jug of milk. She was completely submerged in her thoughts.

*The eggs weren't refrigerated. They had milk that wasn't refrigerated. Where do they put the biscuits? What is minced meat? I didn't see frozen or canned veggies...only fresh ones. I didn't see Mexican food. They barely had noodles. We aren't going to survive.*

She loaded the groceries into the car and started to back out of the parking spot. As she eased out, she looked into the rearview mirror. She saw her eyes, but her reflection seemed to be looking back at her. The reflection's eyes moved slightly to the left. Tessa's gaze became intense and glued to the mirror but the mirror's eyes looked sad. She leaned closer and closer to the mirror and became scared.

They looked so familiar. *Why were they so sad? Is this really happening? I must be sick.* The mirror's eyes suddenly looked behind her, and the sadness changed to worry and fear.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!



"HEY! YOU ARE BLOCKIN' THE CAR PARK!" an angry man yelled through the window.

"I'm sorry! I just got distracted!" Tessa responded. "I'm on my way!"

"Well, watch it next time, mate!" The man walked away. He had dark red hair from what Tessa could see, for it was getting dark. He wore khaki shorts and a button-down dark blue shirt with brown men's sandals. She thought she could hear him muttering something about Americans as he walked away.

Tessa put the car in drive and started for home. The man had completely distracted her from the twin reflection she had seen in the rearview mirror. Later, Tessa thought it must have just been the angle at which she sat combined with the altitude from the flight. No one sees people in mirrors. That is impossible.

.....

"Hey, honey! How was the store? Was it nice? Don't worry about the cost; I'll give you some money. Tessa?" Mom rattled off the normal welcome home conversation. It was so much of a habit she couldn't stop until she had finished the last word. Tessa ran upstairs to her room in the meantime. Mom followed.

"You okay, sweetie?"

"I think I'm just going to go to bed."

"Are you sick?"

"I think maybe just tired and little delirious from the flights. I really need to rest. You guys have dinner."

"Okay, but if you need me, I'll be right downstairs."

"Thanks, Mom."

"Good night, babe. Hey! We're in Australia!" Mom did a victory dance.

Tessa smiled, and Mom turned off the light. They were definitely not in Tipton anymore.

## CHAPTER 3

It was so hot and dry it stung her face. The gum trees that survived the drought had branches all around their bases where they had dried out from the lack of rain and fallen off. Even the slightest wind could break a huge branch off the brittle trees. She found herself by a large, circular stone trench in the ground. A donkey led by a man dragged a large piece of wood around the circle, and another poured in some kind of clay. The trench was filled with water that poured in from a series of pipes stemming from a water wheel.

Hundreds of holes dotted the ground in all directions. White rocks with tints of pink lay in huge piles everywhere between the holes. The noise was suddenly overwhelming. A thin metal contraption about three stories tall came from the ground near what seemed to be a mine. A whistle blew, and men started pouring out from the holes in the surrounding plots and the mine itself.

A well-dressed man with a young lady stood near the water wheel. The men gathered in front, ready to listen to an announcement.

"Listen up, men! This is my daughter, Lillian Odessa Taylor. You are to treat her with respect and get her anything she needs. She is a lady! Having said that, I would also like to announce her engagement to my partner, Mr. Cooper. So hands off, boys! You hear? Get to lunch."

As the men dispersed, the young lady seemed to be watching a man over by a nearby gum tree. She looked as if she knew him. He felt her gaze and turned around to look at her. He smiled.

Tessa rushed down from the loft and inhaled breakfast. She had texted Mason, and he was planning on picking her up in an hour. She still needed to shower, fix her hair, and pick out her best outfit.

"Mom! I need the shower! I'm leaving in an hour! MOM!"

"Okay, Tess. I'm going to work on the house today. Have fun!"

Mason picked Tessa up from the hotel on time. He even opened the door for her to get into his car. *What a gentleman! They really raise 'em right over here.*

"So was there some kind of mine around here?" Tessa asked Mason.

"Good guess! Yes, actually. Victoria had the largest gold rush in the history of the world back in the 1850's. In some parts they are still mining. This town is an old gold-mining town. It was one of the richest! Would you like to see some of the mine fields?"

"Yes! That sounds great!" Mason drove west out of town to an area called Chewton. The side roads all had names like "Goldspeck" and "Dishpan." These roads were dirt unlike the roads in town and covered the car with rusty colored dust as they drove.

"So you moved in with your grandma over here?" Mason asked her.

"Actually, we're moving into my Nana's house. She died back in America." Tessa had never really said her grandma was dead out loud before. She paused for a second and then continued. "Nana left us her



house in her will. We had no idea she even owned it until the lawyer told my mom. So Mom decided we could start a new life over here."

"That's amazing! You just up and left everything. That is very brave of you. Is it too personal to ask about your dad?"

"Not at all. I haven't seen him in a few years actually. He and Mom got divorced when I was really young. He moved to Seattle. I used to visit, but then I got busy with school, and now I just get phone calls every now and then."

"Do you have any siblings?"

"I have a younger brother named Ben. How about you?"

"I'm an only child unfortunately. I always wanted a brother. You must love it!"

Tessa laughed. "It's a love/hate thing. Most of the time he's super annoying, but he has his moments. Are your parents still together?"

"Nah. My mom left when I was little. She said my dad never paid enough attention to her. She figured I'd be just like him, so she left me, too. Here we are."

Tessa was so engrossed with Mason that she hadn't paid attention to how they had arrived at the site. Everywhere she looked there were holes in the ground. Thousands of holes in every direction. Mason and Tessa got out of the car, and she walked towards the field of holes.

"Be careful. Sometimes branches fall over the holes and you could fall in. People die every year out here."

She made sure to look where she was going.

"So tell me more about America. What was your town like?"

Tessa sighed. "I lived in a small town called Tipton. It's smaller than Castlemaine. It's an old farming town. I worked at the Pizza Shack. It's this old pizza buffet next to the railroad tracks. Um. . . corn is a big deal in my town. Most of the people are farmers or come from farming families. There are cornfields everywhere. I'm talking too much. . . ."

"No," Mason touched her arm. "I like talking with you."

Tessa smiled and felt her whole body turn red.

RING RING RING!

Tessa grabbed for her phone in her back pocket and nearly dropped it. Mason snatched it out of the air before it could fall into one of the old mining holes.

"Hello?"

"Tessa, sweetie! Where are you? You just ran out the door this morning!"

"Mom, I'm hanging out with a friend from school. He's showing me around."

"A BOY! Already? You go, girl! Well, babe, I'm just furniture shopping in Bendigo. It's this bigger town maybe 40 minutes away. I need your opinion on some furniture. Could your new friend bring you over? And then I can meet him!"

"I will ask him. Could you drive me to Bendigo? Mom wants me to look at furniture for our house."

"Sure."

"He says sure, Mom. We'll be there soon."

.....

"Well, this is it!" Mason concluded when he pulled up to the furniture store in Bendigo.

"Thanks for showing me around," Tessa blushed. *Please set a second date. Please.*

"Would you want to come over after you help your mum? We could have tea at my place."

"I don't really like tea," Tessa answered. *Stupid Tessa. Accept the invitation.* She quickly added, "But I would still love to come!"

Mason burst out laughing. "Babe, tea is dinner. Not the actual drink!"

"Oh! I had no idea." She blushed again. "Tea sounds great."

"See you tonight!"

Tessa walked into the furniture store and searched for her mother. She found her sprawled out across a red leather couch. Tessa smiled. Leave it to Mom to test every couch in the store and still not make a decision.

Mom explained that she was stuck between a red leather couch and a mustard-colored one. Each couch dictated the entire decorating scheme; thus, this was a life-altering decision in Mom's world. Tessa sat on each couch and discreetly peeked at the prices. The red couch was cheaper.

"You know, Mom, I really like the red one. It's much more comfortable than the mustard one. Let's get that one. You go up to the counter, and I'm going to use the restroom before we leave," Tessa instructed.

"Great choice, sweetie! I knew I could count on you."



Tessa unlocked the stall and approached the sink row. She scanned the soap dispensers and chose the sink with the most soap. As she started pumping the soap into her hand, she looked up into the mirror and noticed another woman standing in the doorway of a neighboring stall. Tessa gasped.

"You scared me!"

The woman did not respond. She tilted her head and looked like she might cry. Tessa turned around to speak to her, but when she turned around, the woman had disappeared! Tessa looked under all the stalls and saw no feet or a sign of any woman anywhere. She couldn't have gotten past Tessa because she would have walked right by her to exit the restroom. Tessa's hair began to stand on end, and goose bumps covered her body. She slowly turned back to the mirror and looked up.

The woman was much closer to Tessa now. Tessa's face went white. The goose bumps heightened. Her hands began to shake. The woman raised her hand and signaled for Tessa to come closer. As Tessa leaned into the mirror she rested her hand on its edges. A flash of white light erased the restroom. Tessa was suddenly standing outdoors, in a cemetery.

The woman and the man from the mine were near the edge of the cemetery. Tessa's vision zoomed in to study their expressions. The man was crying, and the woman was very depressed. Dirt was caked onto each of their outfits. The man knelt down to the gravestone. It was unmarked. He rested his hand on top and looked down at the ground. The woman offered her hand on his shoulder. After a few seconds, he returned her gesture by placing his hand on top of hers. Tessa noticed the grave was outlined in chunks of white-pinkish crystallized rock. Three gum trees were in the center of the graveyard. A makeshift fence made of branches and sticks plunged into the dirt, outlining the area. The dirt path leading to the cemetery was narrow. Tessa knew it had been walked more often than one would hope.

The man threw his fist into the ground next to the gravestone and abruptly rose and walked off. The woman smiled down at the grave with tears in her eyes and lightly touched the gravestone. She silently said her good-bye. Slowly, she turned, but then picked up her pace to catch up with the man. She reached for his hand, but he brushed her off. The man was fuming.

Tessa began to think that this person that had died could have been murdered! What other possible reason was there for his anger? Maybe he was just upset because that was his way of grieving. Maybe, but that walk looked like the man was out for revenge.

Tessa flashed back into the restroom at the furniture store. She was so dizzy upon her landing that she took a few wobbly steps backward and almost tripped. Tessa looked at herself in the mirror and promised that she would not tell anyone about her visions until she knew what was going on. Everyone would think she was crazy. No one sees old miners and their wives in mirrors at furniture stores. She decided to file this vision away in her mind and prepare for her dinner date with Mason.

## CHAPTER 4

Mason's home was not what Tessa had expected. Although he had a nice enough car, the house itself was huge. The front door led into a grand entranceway. To the left of the door was a game room with a pool table, ping-pong table, poker table, bar, and big screen TV loaded with every video game console invented. To the right of the door was a smaller sitting room. This room had clearly been decorated by a woman. The couch was lavender, and two cream, wingback chairs flanked each side. A delicate coffee table was covered in doilies and dust. A portrait-sized picture of a woman, man, and baby hung on the wall. Thick dust made it almost indistinct, but Tessa inferred that this must have been Mason's parents and Mason as a baby.

Also from the door Tessa could see an enormous living room in the rear of the house. As Mason guided her to the room, on her right she passed a kitchen fit for a chef, complete with two walk-in pantries. Through the kitchen, a small hallway led to a mystery door.

"What's back there?" Tessa asked Mason.

"That's where Dad works. It's his office. You're not allowed back there," Mason firmly answered. Tessa was surprised at his tone.

Mason touched a small screen on the wall next to the living room and turned on the lights. As light filled the room, Tessa could feel her jaw drop. Gold mining artifacts lined the high-ceiling room. Authentic mining picks, wagon wheels, old photographs, a pistol, and old-fashioned posters of gold nuggets covered the walls. A lighted display case was full of buttons, small gold nuggets, gold flakes in water, and antique food tins. The side tables, coffee table, and accessory sofa table were beautifully restored oak and fit right in with two blue, mustard, and brown patterned chairs, matching ottoman, and overstuffed couch. A flat-screen television sat on top of the sofa table and seemed slightly out of place. To the left of the living room were double glass doors that led to a deck. Everything in the room centered on a stone fireplace. The fireplace extended slightly into the room and provided a large stone bench for seating. Accent pillows were dotted on both sides of the fireplace opening. Above the carved oak mantle hung a framed map. The very old map was nearly six feet long by five feet high. The paper itself was almost gold due to aging. The edges were brown and looked as though they would curl up if the map were released from its frame.

"This is beautiful! You really have an amazing home! Look at all this gold mining stuff! How long have you and your dad been collecting it?" Tessa wondered.

"Some of this stuff has been in our family for years. Other stuff Dad or I find, and then we find a place for it in here. That pistol my Dad's grandpa found. That's why it's in such good condition. They found that in the 40's. Come see this." Mason motioned her towards a gold nugget poster. "This is one of the largest nuggets ever found. It's called the Welcome Stranger. One day some miners were riding in their wagon, and the wheel hit a huge rock and cracked. They got out to check it and realized that the rock they had hit was actually a gold nugget. They dug the whole thing up and realized it was too big to put in the wagon in that condition, so they would have to come back in the morning. They buried it, and when



they came back in the morning, tent spikes were there! Someone had slept all night on top of the gold! See, you have to have a permit for the land that you dig, and since these guys didn't have a permit for that area, if they let on that they had found the nugget, the government would have gotten it. So they snuck it home in their wagon and faked like they had dug it up in their paddock. This picture isn't even accurate. They owed some money to shopkeepers and mates, so they broke off bits of the nugget. Then, when they went to sell it, it was too big for the scale, so they had to break it into chunks to weigh it! Luckily someone quickly sketched it before they broke it up. This poster is just a guess at what it actually looked like."

Mason was very knowledgeable and passionate about the history of the gold rush. Tessa found his enthusiasm attractive and asked more questions about the artifacts.

"Did you find all these little ones in the display case?"

"I found a few. I used to go out with Dad all the time, but recently I've been into hanging out with mates and going to parties. I've been busy training for the cricket and footy. I found that one there," he pointed. "The one that looks like a foot. It's about half an ounce. You could sell it for 45 dollars."

"What's this big map?"

"That's been in the family for decades. It shows-"

"MASON!" A voice harshly bellowed from the living room entrance. "What is SHE doing here?"

Tessa was startled at first, but then started to squint at the man. His hair was a familiar dark red, and his fashion style looked like something she had seen before.

Mason looked with confusion at his dad. They silently exchanged a conversation. Mason's father did not acknowledge Tessa.

"Watch it," he commanded and stormed back into his office. Tessa instantly knew that the man from the grocery store parking lot was Mason's dad.

After he was gone, Mason informed Tessa that they should probably get out of there. They could pick up some fish and chips and see more of the town. His dad was not in the mood for visitors, and he had a distaste for Americans. Although Tessa was offended, she knew that Mason's dad's opinions were not under Mason's control. She followed him to his car.

.....

After picking up fish and chips, Mason offered to show Tessa Moonlight Flat, an area just east of town. At first this sounded romantic, but mentioned next was a short tour of a pine plantation and graveyard. A first kiss couldn't possibly happen in a graveyard or a silly pine plantation. At least they would be together and away from Mason's father, however.

"See there? That's one of the pine plantations. See how all the trees are planted in perfect rows? Pine trees are not native to Australia, so they were planted here. I think it was to help with erosion because pine trees have deep roots. Gum trees are the native trees here," Mason informed Tessa.

"How far back do the trees go?" Tessa asked.

"A long way. At least a couple kilometers." Mason could sense that Tessa was not too impressed with the pine plantation. It was beginning to get dark, too. "The main attraction is coming up! The old Pennyweight Cemetery."

They pulled up to an old dirt road. A few houses dotted the opposite side of the street, and only one house had the porch lights on. This provided just enough light for Tessa to catch a glimmer of the cemetery ahead. Mason put the car in park and turned the key to off.

"See that house with the light on? A woman lives there with her two kids. Her name is Leesa. She is friends with my father." Mason took a deep breath and paused for just a moment. He contemplated continuing and then said, "When this place was heavy with miners, they started bringing their families over. Most of the people did not find gold and had a hard time adapting to the conditions. It's very hot, there is not much water, and they were exhausted from the long days digging and working in the mines. The women and children would have had hardly anything to eat. They had no real houses for sometimes years. They would live in tents. Women had no medicine or doctors or even places not covered in dust from the draughts. When they had babies, the infants would rarely make it past two or three years old. Anyway, aside from miners dying from inhaling fumes or suffering cave-ins, children had a very high mortality rate."

Mason opened his door and stepped outside. Tessa followed him. They started to walk towards the cemetery. The walk gave Tessa chills. Mason was being very quiet. He seemed to want to scare her on purpose. She hoped it was so she would grab his hand or bury her face in his shoulder with fear.

"This is a children's cemetery. It's called the Pennyweight Flat Cemetery," Mason told her as they walked through the old rod iron gate. "Leesa, the woman across the street, sees a young girl on her swing set from time to time at night."

"Her daughter?"

"No, she has two sons. The girl is a ghost from the 1850's. She wears a very faded yellow dress, and her hair is messy. She swings on the swing set at night. She looks very sad. I don't think she ever got to have fun in her life, so she goes to Leesa's to play." Mason took Tessa's hand. "Are you scared?"

Tessa blushed and looked away. Down near a gravestone she saw a piece of broken glass. The blonde woman from her visions looked back at Tessa with fear and curiosity.

She looked back at Mason. "Is it normal? To see ghosts, I mean," she asked him slowly.



"Yes, actually, a lot of people around here see ghosts. In Tasmania, the island to the south, there is an old prison where the really bad criminals were sent when Australia was first being discovered. There is a cell that when certain people enter it, they are overwhelmed with sadness and grief and can't even stand up. In the capital of Tasmania, some people see a woman in a red ball gown out on a balcony. Other people see patients in an old hospital. They never tell a ghost story unless three separate unrelated people see it three separate times. Those are more famous ghosts, but it is normal to see ghosts like Leesa's little miner's daughter."

Tessa and Mason continued to walk around the cemetery. She noticed a certain gravestone over in a corner. Immediately she recognized this as the grave that the man and the woman were mourning over.

"What makes a ghost? I mean, why are they here?" Tessa asked Mason.

"Well, there are several different kinds of ghosts. There are ghosts that are stuck in an important moment. That moment was so full of emotion that it stitched its own mark that is untouched by time. That could be someone, say, trying to escape their home while it's burning down. A person would see them trying to get out the window all the time. They would do nothing else. Other ghosts are creatures of habit. Someone that paces the hall everyday or looked out the window waiting for their long lost love could be a habit ghost. Ghosts that do not materialize are also in that category. Those are normally responsible for opening drawers or windows and making creaking sounds, that whole lot. There is one last kind of ghost: ghosts that have unfinished business. They are stuck between this world and the next until someone liberates them. I think those are the scariest kind. They are rarely confined by space or rules. They can be dangerous." Mason's voice was serious. Tessa quickly changed the subject.

"What are these little rocks around the graves?" she asked.

"Those are bits of quartz. Quartz is where the gold is found. Finding a vein of quartz means that gold is not far away. There was a lot of it lying around so it was easy to use as grave markers. Some people couldn't even afford gravestones. They only had the bits of quartz."

"Look at this one, Mason. Mary, 1 year old. That is so sad." Mason squeezed her hand.

"Let's take you home."

## CHAPTER 5

*HONK HONK HONK!* Ben slammed down on the horn. "TESSY! HURRY UP!"

Tessa was, of course, mortified that her younger, annoying brother was making a scene on her second day of school. She glared at him. She could hear whispers and feel the other students' glances burning through the back of her head. *Great! As if my accent wasn't enough.*

"Oh, sweetie! Hurry and get in! I have a wonderful surprise for you! The house is ready!" Mom shouted in excitement.

Tessa slammed the door. She wasn't mad at Mom, just embarrassed by Ben.

"That's so fast, Mom! Everything is ready?" Tessa asked.

"Well, there's still painting and some small repairs, but the furniture is all paid for and moved in! I picked out bedspreads for you guys, but if you don't like them, the saleswoman said we can take them back and exchange them. Ben, I chose a jungle theme for you and a pretty yellow for you, Tessa. Also, I heard from some ladies at my new job that we need to try Papa's Fish and Chips and also the meat pies from the Hot N Crusty bakery. Maybe we could go out tonight as a family?"

"I LOVE CHIPS!" Ben shouted.

"Quiet, Benny. Inside voices. They aren't actual potato chips; they call French fries 'chips' over here."

Tessa stayed quiet and looked out the window. Her mind wandered as she over-analyzed every second of her time spent with Mason. *Does he like me? Did I sound stupid? He looked at me funny that first day. ... was there something in my teeth? Am I getting a pimple? I love that he calls me babe. I hope a first kiss comes soon.*

"EARTH TO TESSA! Come in, TESSA! Do you want P-I-E-S or do you want F-I-S-H for D-I-N-," Ben shouted again, just to be cut off by his sister.

"PIES PIES! Pies sound good. Leave me alone! AHHHH!"

"All I wanted was a nice family dinner," Mom said to herself. "Here we are! Home sweet home!"

The house looked different in the daylight. It looked shy but gorgeous, like the pretty girl on the block that kept to herself because she was too preoccupied to notice she was pretty. Four white pillars lined the New Orleans- style first- and second-story porch. Intricately carved wooden rails enclosed the second-story porch so no one would accidentally fall off. The roof greatly overlapped the boundaries of the porch in order to shadow the house no matter the time of day, thus keeping it cool. A dark blue front door seemed to welcome the family home. The oversized white house was surrounded by huge gum trees, but the landscaping needed work. Obviously no one had worked on it in decades. The white wood siding's paint was almost completely peeled off. The shutters probably were a dark blue, matching the front door at one time. Every room in the house had at least one window across from a door that led



to a central hallway on each floor. Opening the windows and doors easily created a cross breeze to deal with the extreme summer heat. Two windows peeked out on top of the second floor, indicating that the attic spanned the whole second story.

"This house would have been the place to be back in its day. Full of people on the deck out back and people watching from the porch. It looks tired now, but we can bring it back to life!" Mom said quietly to herself.

Tessa took a quick, self-guided tour through the first and second floor. To the right of the front door was a simple, cozy living room with a center fireplace. Mom had set up a new television in the far right corner and arranged the furniture including the red couch to face both the fireplace and the television. Beside the living room was a small office, half-bath, and a coat closet. Across from the living room was a huge dining room. The table looked as though it had never moved since the house was built. It could easily seat 12 or more. A swinging door led directly from the dining room into the kitchen. The stairs took up the central hallway. The mirror still hung next to the stairs although it was cleaner. Up the stairs and to the left was Ben's room. It was jungle-themed, just as Mom had said. It would suit him perfectly. Since the move, he had thought he was Steve Irwin. Across the hall from Ben's room would soon be a guest room that currently just held some old junk. Mom's room was above the living room. Her room was big and empty, but Tessa knew she'd fill it up with her crafts and projects. Mom's room had the master bath with an old porcelain tub, complete with "gold"-plated feet and a walk in closet. The master bedroom led out onto the front porch. She walked through the door and gazed out.

Mom met Tessa on the second story porch. "Welcome home, sis."

Tessa smiled at her mother.

"I got a job, sweetie. I start next week. I am going to be the new receptionist at the health clinic down by the botanical gardens. We'll have to take a drive past there so I can show you and Benny where I work!"

"That's great, Mom. I am really proud of you." Tessa gave Mom a one-armed hug. Mom beamed with pride.

"Your room is just through this door. How neat is it that you get a door to the porch in your bedroom?"

Mom guided Tessa through her door. Her room was a pleasant yellow. A white canopy bed was the centerpiece of the room. Mom had also added a matching vanity, small writing desk, and massive armoire. Tessa did not have a closet. Yellow silk tulips and white daisies accented the vanity in a clear vase.

"It's perfect, Mom. I love it! Where did you get this beautiful furniture?"

"It was already here, actually. I bought you a new mattress and bedspread, but the vanity, armoire, desk, and bed frame were already in the room. I did paint, too. I think this was Nana's room. I thought you would like to have her room. You two were so close."

Tessa lay on the bed. She was finally home.

"I'm going to go check on your brother. Why don't you unpack? Then get dressed for dinner? Meat pies!" Mom closed Tessa's door on her way out.

Tessa no longer felt like pieces of her were missing or out of place. All of her inside puzzle pieces were in the right spots. She couldn't stop smiling, until she looked to the vanity. There was an old mirror lying face down. Tessa suddenly understood what she must do.

She rushed through her backpack and brought out a pad of paper. She jotted down: unfinished business, strong moment, and habit. Another list formed under it: mirrors, gold mines, and cemetery.

This woman, Lillian Taylor, must be an unfinished business ghost. She was able to move from place to place via mirrors. She obviously could materialize. Every time Tessa had a vision of the woman, it was different. She saw what the woman showed her, what she wanted her to see. This woman deserved to feel complete, just like Tessa. Tessa decided it was up to her to help this ghost woman. She reached for the mirror on the vanity. She was careful to keep the reflective surface hidden until she was ready. Tessa closed her eyes and drew the mirror up, arms' length from her face. She opened her eyes and saw the woman staring back at her. Instead of sadness or fear, the woman looked excited. Tessa slowly brought her index finger of her free hand up to the mirror. She touched it and was gone.



## CHAPTER 6

It was if Tessa were herself an invisible ghost watching a movie in which she was completely immersed but yet not involved at all. She could see the entire setting from 360 degrees, yet she could not see herself in the setting. Her sight somehow floated in the midair and panned and zoomed in and out theatrically to make the most of each line of dialogue and facial expression and also to absorb the gorgeous surroundings.

She focused her visual lens on the young woman from her visions. She was dressed in a rather large, blue, lacy gown that showed off her figure. She had dark brown hair, sunkissed skin, and the lightest blue eyes. Her eyes seemed so familiar. The woman looked about 20 years old. But those blue eyes. . .they were longing for something. . .for someone. . .

She sat at the edge of a waterfall holding her knees onto her chest and looking out. The water trickled slowly beside her. Her eyes scanned the area. It was a little past midday, so the sun was almost directly overhead, leaving no shadows in the deep crater that lay below. The waterfall began its route behind her, slowly moving between small cracks and little puddles in the solid rock. The water ended its journey in a perfectly round pool at one side of a perfectly round deep crater in the earth. The roundness made the area look unreal, as though God had designed it himself as a secret getaway by pressing His staff into the ground. Past the pool was a moon-shaped meadow that filled the rest of the crater. A few gum trees near the water gave perfect shade for potential onlookers to rest and socialize. The right side of the crater's wall was made up of the same stone on which the woman sat. The left side, however, was covered in tall grasses and coffee bush. The left side was not as steep as the right. A vague pathway of matted grasses zigzagged down the left side, clearly indicating that someone had ventured down several times.

The woman closed her eyes and breathed in deeply as if she were breathing in the entire scene. She opened her eyes and quickly unbuttoned and removed her boots. She stood up abruptly and stripped away her crystal blue gown, flounces, and lacy chemisette leaving only her petticoat and pantalettes, much like a bloomer suit for undergarments. Tossing the clothing in a pile, she quickly moved to the edge. Her arms opened like a bird's, and she closed her eyes. Slowly she leaned over, prolonging the fall, not because of fear, but to savor the moment.

As if Tessa's invisible camera had changed angles, she saw a man approach the woman from behind. Just before she would make the plunge, he grabbed her waist and pulled her back. The woman turned around in his arms. Her nose pressed against his chest. She slowly looked up at his face.

"Don't want to be jumpin' down there, miss. Don't know what I'd do without you if you got cut up by the rocks at the bottom," the man said to her.

"I'm Nolan O'Macy." Nolan had straight, thick, strawberry-blonde hair that grew almost to his ears. He had clearly combed it, but the wind had knocked pieces out of place and a few strands fell across his forehead. Dark brown eyes stared into her crystal blue eyes. He drew his perfectly shaped lips back like curtains fastened by dimples to show his teeth. He smiled at her, and she melted a little inside.

The woman stared into his eyes. Although she was safely standing a distance away from the ledge, he still held her close to his body. She didn't seem to mind.

"I'm Lil-," she began.

"Lillian Odessa Taylor," he finished for her.

"Lilly," she corrected, always needing to have the last word. "I have seen you at the mine."

"I couldn't take my eyes off of you either," Nolan admitted in a soft, kind voice. "I can't stop thinking about you." She smiled and broke free of his arms. They walked towards the ledge and sat with their legs dangling over the side, looking on the serene landscape.

"Why were you tryin' to dive off this cliff?"

"Why were you following me?" she answered with a sassy tone. She was now able to observe the rest of him. He wore a dirty white blouse that fit loosely on his muscular chest with dirty brown pants held up by dirty brown suspenders. A miner if she'd ever seen one.

He laughed. "I come here all the time to think and to rest. This land is too beautiful to be diggin' underneath it all day. I didn't know I'd be having company this time. You discovered Turpins pretty hasty for only being here a week."

"Now I know you are following me! How did you know I arrived just a week ago?"

"Miss Lilly, your clothes haven't been caked in the dust, and your pretty cheeks haven't turned to brown. Plus, I can count," Nolan said sarcastically as he touched the back of his hand to her cheek.

"Boss introduced you on your first day! He's awfully proud to have you here. We were all surprised you made the trip alone. You are very brave, Miss Lilly. All the boys have been talkin' about you this whole week."

"Yes, well...", she said slowly, "There was nothing for me back home and. . .well. . .I don't know. I have been craving an adventure. I want to discover new things and new places. Father has his own plans for me, but I want to see the world. I want to record all the new creatures that I find. Just like the scientist Charles Darwin."

"I admire that about you." They both smiled and looked away. Lilly was quick to change the subject.

"How did you come to be here?"

"I came over with my brother Cian and my mate Mick. We were hopin' to strike gold and bring the rest of the family over here, but we haven't been too lucky just yet. Just been workin' in the mine savin' up a little money so we can buy ourselves some land and start diggin' for ourselves. Ma wasn't sure about sending Cian over, but he's been doing real well for himself, stayin' outta trouble. Mick is a bit of a hard guy, but he's always there when I need him. His family lived close to mine back in Ireland."

"They sound charming." Lilly put her hand on top of Nolan's. He turned his hand over so that their palms were touching and interlaced his fingers with hers. She scooted a bit closer to him.

"Lilly, I. . ." He paused and frowned. "I think you are really going to make that Cooper a happy man."

Lilly frowned and looked away. "He is not the reason that I came to this place. I. . .I don't. . .I am not in love with him. He is a good man but. . .there's been. . .someone else on my mind."



Intrigued, Nolan scooted closer to her, their hips only micrometers from touching. He reached across for her other hand. He put her far hand on his chest and placed the other around his neck. Their eyes met like powerful magnets that could not be pulled apart. He leaned in and put his forehead against hers.

"I know," he whispered. "Me, too."

Lilly pulled his lips to hers. At first she kissed him quickly and with force, but he slid his hands around her so that he cradled her face and slowed the momentum down. Tessa almost forgot that she was not really there until she noticed her invisible eyes starting to tear up.

Just then, someone pressed fast forward, and the movie reel in which Tessa was suspended sped to the left. The film was too fast to see anything clearly. No matter the direction Tessa tried to face she saw her surrounding just flashing forward. She felt like Dorothy in the cyclone. A sudden painless jolt and the scene halted.

## CHAPTER 7

Lilly ran up to Nolan standing at the edge of the pool in the bottom of the crater that was Turpin Falls. The smile across her face screamed true love.

"Nolan!"

He hugged her, but his heart was not in it.

"What's the matter? Has something happened?" she looked confused as she asked.

"I don't like it one bit, Lil. I can't live another day while you are escorted around the damn mine like some dog on a leash. Why can't you just tell your father that we're together? Tell him you don't love Cooper. Tell him, Lilly," he angrily pleaded to her.

"You know I can't do that! Father would kill you. Cooper would kill you. I am doing this for us. To keep you safe. You said you wouldn't be jealous. You knew this." She was frustrated with the situation. She wanted to be with Nolan but was obviously scared of the repercussions.

"I don't care about being safe. I want to be with you. I don't want to hide it! And I don't want you with him or anyone else."

"We have to for now. I only go with him to the mines to see you. So we can spend more time together. It's to keep up appearances, Nolan. You knew this would be this way," she said sternly, but then her voice and face softened. "I don't love him. I love you, Nolan."

He pulled her face to his and kissed her. She buried her face into his chest.

"Come sit down, my love. I have news," he told her.

He led her to a fallen tree that served as a makeshift park bench. It sat under another tree, shading the pair from the heat of the day.

"Cian and I have earned enough to purchase our own bit of land and begin to mine for ourselves. We are going to give up one position at your father's mine and trade off digging at the new plot. It's a ways away from the town but not so far that I can't come see you. Once me and Cian find us some gold, we can be together. We can settle somewhere and bring my family over here. We can be together, Lilly. I've got a good feeling about this. I just know it's our turn." He could barely finish before Lilly was all smiles and wrapping her overjoyed arms around his neck.

"I am so proud of you! This is so exciting! Now you have no reason to worry. I won't need to come to the mine with Cooper. There will be no one important to see." Her smile was ornery. Time slowed, and Nolan took Lilly's hand.

"I love you. Just us, right?"

"Just us," she answered and kissed him.

As they were kissing, a young, thin strawberry blonde boy appeared at the top of the crater.



"Nol! Miss Lillian! Best hurry up! Mr. Cassius is searchin' the whole area for Miss Lillian. Cooper's out, too! They are starting to rouse up the boys as well. Mr. Cassius is in a flamin' mood," he shouted down to the happy couple.

"We'll be right up, Cian!" Nolan shouted to his brother. He turned his attention back to Lilly.

"We'll meet here again in three days. It's best to let this settle down before stirring it up again," Nolan said to her, and she silently agreed. One more quick kiss on the forehead, and he pulled her up off the broken log and held her hand all the way up the ancient stone steps. At the top they took one last look at each other, sketched it in their minds, and parted ways.

## CHAPTER 8

Months had gone by, and the wind had brought in the cold. The cold stuck on a person. No matter how many layers of clothing were added, no one rich or poor could escape the sting. Weather, sickness, and death were God's way of making everyone equal, it seemed. However, Nolan embraced his newfound equality.

He celebrated by whistling on his journey out to his and Cian's plot. The walk was brutally boring and took nearly fifty minutes, but Nolan soaked in the sun and brisk air. He thought of Lilly and their future together. He thought of his family back in Ireland. He remembered the cold there. The cold there felt like home, and he knew no matter the weather, his mother would keep everyone warm and well fed. Some days he thought he could see a halo atop the crown of her head. He missed her. He knew Cian missed them all.

Nolan had the plot in his sight and shouted for his brother. He heard nothing.

"Cian? Come on out now! Let's have a bit of supper," he called out to his brother.

Nolan and Cian had been digging in a small hillside. The entry to the main shaft was narrow and hidden behind a rock and coffee bush. Nolan apprehensively crawled inside the passageway to search for his brother. He thought maybe Cian had gone to the second plot. They had been diligently working in this hillside area due to the weather, but perhaps Cian had a feeling about the open plot 20 minutes away. Who was Nolan to deny a gut feeling about the mining business? Gut feelings had made lots of poor men very rich.

Upon entering the crawl space, the cold that had been so welcoming to Nolan before now hit him like hundreds of needles straight into his bones. Nausea set in first but was quickly run out by paranoia. Paranoia filled up Nolan's lungs until he could no longer catch his breath. He tried to call out to his brother. No words could come out. The passageway had caved in. Cian was trapped.

Frantically, Nolan dug at the cold, frozen earth. His nails bled. Tears made paths down his cheeks in the rusty dirt. He did not breathe. He could not breathe. After minutes that seemed like hours, he broke through. The small hole he had created was not large enough for a person, but just large enough for a hand. He called loudly for Cian. A painful groan slips through the hole.

Nolan's bleeding fingers plunged through the opening, violently dragging chunks of iced dirt out. After the opening had become just large enough, Nolan forced his body through.

He lit the lantern. His brother, his best friend, lay under a pile of rock. Droplets of blood ran from the corner of his lips. Cian weakly reached for Nolan. Nolan screamed and cried and pushed with all his remaining strength to roll away the rock that was crushing the life from his brother. Four tries and then success. Nolan took Cian's innocent head into his lap.

"It's okay. It's okay. I'm here now. Nolan is here now," he sobbed.

"I'm cold," Cian answered. Nolan quickly ripped off his coat and placed it around Cian. While tucking it around his waist, Nolan realized his brother's belly was filling with blood. The cave-in had smashed Cian's organs. He was bleeding to death internally.



"Am I going to be okay, Nolan?" Cian could barely cough out the words.

"I'm not so sure this time, brother." Cian looked so scared. "Don't be afraid. You are going to go to a place so much better than this piece of rock. Somewhere that is never cold. You will never be hungry. You will never be poor because there is no money." Nolan sobbed and pressed his face into his brother's chest. "You will be up in the clouds, looking down on me. You can take care of Mama. You can go home, Cian. Home. Don't be afraid."

Cian coughed. More blood spilled onto the ground. "Nol. . .gold. . .gold. . . ." Cian smiled and closed his eyes.

.....

Nolan threw his fist into the ground next to the gravestone and abruptly rose and walked off. Lilly smiled down at the grave with tears in her eyes and lightly touched the gravestone. She silently said her goodbye. Slowly, she turned but picked up her pace to catch up with her man. She reached for his hand, but he denied her. He was fuming.

She touched his shoulder, and he turned around, grabbing her wrist. She gasped, and fear washed across her face.

"I'm sorry. I'm not angry with you. I'm angry with me," Nolan explained to her. "It's my fault. I should have quit that job and been out there with him. I knew it wasn't safe out there. I knew that. But I wanted to stay close to you. I was so selfish, and now my brother is dead. That is on my shoulders."

"Nolan O'Macy. Cian's passing was not your fault. It was not. Look at me. This is not your fault. He loved you. You loved him. This was an accident. He knew that. If you had been there, you could have died with him. Now how selfish would that be? You would be leaving your family with nothing. You would be leaving me. That would have been selfish," Lilly sternly enforced. "Let's run away. Let's just leave this horrible place. Let's run away to the coast and live off the land. We'll send for your family. We can be wonderful."

"You are right, my Lilly. I cannot be selfish. I cannot leave our digging unfinished," Nolan's face brightened and looked determined. "He said gold. He said gold, Lilly."

"What? What about running away?"

"The last thing he said to me. He said 'Nol....gold....gold....' I have to go! I love you."

.....

Nolan ran back to the campsite that he had been sharing with Mick, Cian, and other miners working for Cassius and Cooper. Tents and small shacks dotted the dry, cold desert. Nolan stormed into his tent, gathering his pick, shovel, pan, and canteen. Mick looked suspiciously through the tent opening.

"What you up to, mate?" Nolan jumped.

"I didn't even hear you out there. I'm just gathering my things to go out to our plot. I decided it isn't right to let Cian's digging be unfinished."

"Well, that's alright then, isn't it? Would you be wanting any," Mick paused, "help with that diggin'? I could be another man out there."

"No thanks, mate. I have things under control."

"Are you sure? Don't want to be having another accident and leaving your precious Miss Lilly all alone now, would you?" Mick pressed.

Nolan stopped his hurrying. His eyes drifted off, and his thoughts gently fell to Cian, then to Lilly. His eyebrows and cheeks strained to meet, putting a stern and scary look upon his face.

"Never speak of her. Just one person knowing could ruin everything for me. I already lost my brother. I cannot lose her." His voice lingered in the tent with Mick as he quickly stormed out to the cave.

The long walk seemed to take even longer. It felt like years since Nolan had pulled his younger brother's body out of that cave. He crawled through that same narrow passageway, hidden away from the world by thick coffee bush and a large rock. He entered that same chamber where he had found his brother smashed and bleeding to death. He moved the rock that had killed his brother and sat up on his knees where he had held Cian in his arms.

"He must have been digging here," Nolan thought out loud. With strength, he plunged his shovel into the floor of the chamber and wedged it between the floor and ceiling to help prevent another cave-in. With the pick, he started to gently scratch at the wall where the dirt was still loose from the cave-in. Pixie-size dust specks floated to the ground and revealed their treasure. Cian had found quartz!

Nolan crawled at sprint pace out of the passageway to find more support beams. A nearby fallen gum tree would work perfectly. Minutes later, Nolan excavated huge chunks of quartz. He brought the lantern closer to the wall.

The wall sparkled with more gold than he had ever seen. Gold in this cavern outweighed the gold brought up from Cassius and Cooper's mine times ten. Nolan had discovered the largest gold deposit in Victoria.

"MICK! MICK!" Nolan came hollering back into the camp after dark.

"This had better be important! I've got a long shift tomorrow!" Mick was very grumpy.

"I got it, Mick! I found it. The biggest nugget I have ever seen. More gold than this entire mine has found since it started!" Nolan whispered.

"This is amazing! Where is it? I can help you bring it out," Mick whispered back in excitement.

"That'd be great. I want to tell Lilly first. I will keep you informed as to when I see her next," Nolan planned.

"Congratulations! Good fortune has finally smiled on you." Mick turned to exit Nolan's tent.

"Mick?" Mick turned around.



"I think I may just surprise Lilly. I could get the money for the nugget and then we could get married, but I could make it a surprise. What do you think?"

"I will keep it just between us" Mick smiled and returned to his tent for the night.

## CHAPTER 9

"Lilly!" His voice called out from behind a large gum tree inside their secret waterfall crater.

"Nolan? Come out so I can see you! I can't stay long. My father has had me under lock and key since the other night when we stayed out so late," she called out to him. She walked towards the source of the voice. As she peered slowly around the trunk of the tree, she felt Nolan gently put his hands around her waist and take her up into his arms.

"Let's run away together," he proposed.

Lilly looked confused. She slowly answered. "Okay, but I thought. . . ." She did not complete her thought because she did not want to press the issue. Running away was what she had first suggested and still wanted so she decided that it would be best not to contradict herself by asking him why he had changed his mind.

His grip tightened around her waist. The sunset's warmth could be felt inside their cozy hiding place. She would normally feel safe, but something in the air did not feel right. She could sense trouble.

"Lil, I have the day off from the mine on Saturday. I will find a horse and wagon, and we can sneak away during the night when your father and the men are asleep. No one will notice I'm gone until Sunday at noon when the work begins after church. It's perfect!"

Lilly returned the hug and thought to herself that she must remember this moment. She let it soak into her bones, her muscles, and her essence. She looked up into his beautiful brown eyes. That man loved her with his entire soul. Anyone that looked into his eyes could see that. "*Some big secret,*" she humorously thought.

He leaned down and kissed her. Every time they kissed, Nolan put his entire heart into it. He had never taken her for granted. Each kiss revealed his undying passion and love. She made sure that she returned his feelings.

"I will always love you," she vowed.

"I have always loved you and will always love you," he promised in return.

.....

Lilly lay on her bed, face down in the pillows crying. She had not worn her beautiful gowns in weeks. She had not bathed. Paths of tears carved their way through the dirt that clung to her face. So engrossed in her sorrow and grief, she did not hear her door open.

"You will marry Mr. Cooper."

Lilly looked up at her father.

"You will not disobey me, Lillian. You are my daughter, and you will fulfill your duty to me and this family. The remainder of our money lies in that mine. If the mine fails, we fail. Mr. Cooper has a fortune back in England. He will secure our future if the worst should happen. You will marry him."



"You cannot tell me who to love and who I shall spend my life with."

"I do not care if you love him. This is not about love. This is about your duty to your family. The boy is gone. He has run off without you. He probably died from an animal attack or fell into test plot holes. You will compose yourself. You will bathe, put on a gown, and marry Mr. Cooper in a week's time," her father sternly commanded, then slammed the door on his way out.

## CHAPTER 10

Tessa jerked her hand back from the mirror and fell backward onto the bed. Exhausted and astounded from her adventure into the past, she fell out into a deep dreamless sleep. When she awoke hours later, the sun had begun to set. She slipped on a pair of flip-flops and ran out of the house.

She quietly commandeered the family car and drove out to Mason's. She was scared of what she had experienced and of being misunderstood by her family. Although Mason and Tessa had just recently met, she felt that he would be understanding and helpful in this situation. He had had experience with ghosts. Seeing his handsome, familiar face would soothe her worries.

Thoughts sprinted through her mind on the car ride over. What had happened to Nolan? The scenes reran in jumbled order. She shook her head in hopes it would sort them out. She pulled the car off the dirt road, and her head bowed to the steering wheel in defeat. She felt air pass in and out of her lungs. Out of the corner of her eye, she felt a connection. A pathway looked familiar. She put the puzzle pieces together. *This is Turpins Falls. Turpins Falls is on the route to Mason's house. In fact, it's only minutes away.*

She finished her journey to Mason's. She pulled the car up to the garage, turned the key off and stepped out. At a quick pace, she moved for the front door. *Silly me, I should have called him. He may not even be home.*

"Mason?" She knocked.

"I thought I told you. You are not welcome here, Miss Wilson." Just as she recognized the voice and slowly turned to see Mason's father, he started to swing a huge shovel at her head. She darted across the open plain for the bush. The sun was setting on fast forward.

Her legs were numb by the time she reached the wooded bush. Her senses were numb. Her worry was beginning to numb as well, so she turned her head to check for the man.

And then, she felt the branch snap.

At first she was overcome by the pain, but it was the darkness that suffocated her. The darkness was that which one could know only from being inside the earth, where no sunlight, no matter how powerful, could penetrate. She felt so small and so scared. *I've fallen into a mine. I will be buried alive.*

The suffocating darkness choked back her intention of releasing tears. Panic weaved its way into the pit of her stomach. She thought of her mother. Mom would never recover from this loss. She would be empty. Ben would sit there in her room, wondering what he had done wrong, and why Tessa had disappeared. Had he been too annoying? If he had given her privacy, would he still have a sister?

She thought of Nana. *This is where Nana is now. She is in this darkness. She is alone, in the scariest place I've ever felt.* Tessa's tears could not be restrained any longer. She let out a sloppy sob, but stopped suddenly. *Voices, familiar voices.*



"This could not have come at a better time. Once I have the gold, Lilly and I can run away together and build a wonderful life for ourselves," Nolan said.

"Enough about her. Where is the gold?" a man said. Tessa recognized the voice. *Nolan's friend from Ireland. What was his name? Mick. That's right, Mick.*

"Why are you so eager to see the gold?" Nolan slowly asked.

"Just haven't seen any in a while," he answered.

"We just brought up heaps at the mine last week. We all got bonus pay. What is this about, Mick? I've known you since we were kids, and this isn't like you." Tessa could sense Mick getting angry. "You don't just help people for no reward—"

"You get everything! My whole life I've wanted what you got. And now you got the prettiest, richest woman and all the gold in this Godforsaken drought. You don't think I can live where you have it all and I have nothing, do you?" Mick yelled at Nolan.

Tessa heard a yell followed by a violent fight. Tessa's concern for her own well-being was moved to the back burner. Her main focus was Nolan. She heard a yelp of pain and then silence. She backed up slowly, gently reaching behind her to feel for the wall of the hole. Once she felt that it was stable, she contoured her shape to fit the hole's, in order to avoid being seen. Someone kicked the loser's side and eased his body across the ledge. Tessa now had a visitor.

She started to shake and stayed close to the wall for a few minutes, but decided to check out the body. She remembered that her phone was in her pocket and opened it for light. Slowly, she walked across the muddy floor of the mining hole.

"Is someone there?" a whisper asked. *Nolan. Wait. This isn't a vision. He just asked for me. This is real life.* Somehow, in this particular mining hole, in this particular moment, the threads of time had melted together. Tessa was not witnessing, but experiencing this. She rushed to his side.

She brought the cellphone screen close to his face and saw that he was in pain and confused about Tessa.

"Who are you? Where did you come from?" he barely managed to ask her.

She took a deep breath and thought before she answered him. *I'm in the 1860's. He's hurt and could be dying. I can't explain time travel and his girlfriend's ghost. It'll scare him to death. Quick, Tessa. Think. What do you say to him? How can you explain this?*

"Don't be afraid," she said to him in her kind, brave voice. "I am here to help you. Where does it hurt?"

He lifted his hand from his side. Fists of blood dripped off his fingers that had been covering the slice made by Mick's shovel. His face was beginning to swell and turn white.

"It's not that bad. Let's just clean you up," Tessa said with shaky confidence. She took her blouse off so that her camisole remained. She folded the blouse and gently placed it on Nolan's gushing wound. He squirmed and moaned in agony. He grabbed Tessa's shoulder and signaled for her to be still and silent. Nolan pointed above. Something was going on.

"Cassius, I want the full amount now, damn it! I didn't just do this for nothin'. I ain't goin' back to Ireland empty handed!" The voice was Mick's. He had come back and brought someone with him.

"I told you, I won't have it all until Lilly's married to Cooper. Don't mouth off to me, boy. Or I'll forget this whole thing and turn you in for murder. Your best friend, no less," Cassius sternly enforced. Tessa connected the dots. *Cassius is Lilly's father. He had Nolan murdered. But he isn't dead; he's just stuck down in this hellhole, bleeding and hurt and alone except for me.* She started to shake. *Mick murdered his best friend.* Nolan could sense her fear and put his free arm around her and pulled her close.

"He's down in that hole, just there. See his blood? Now give me the money. I want to get goin'," Mick demanded.

More sounds from movement from above came pouring into the hole.

"GIRL! God damn it! Where's the gold? I know you've been seein' the ghosts. I know they been tellin' you about it! I will not have wasted my whole life lookin' for it! I know you know where it is. Now just speak up and I won't hurt you," Mason's father yelled. He sounded as angry as Mick had moments before. Nolan pulled her in even closer. She put her hand over her mouth to cover her deep gasps for air. She felt the warmth of Nolan's body next to hers. She felt safe. This man could do her no harm with Nolan at her side. It was if Nolan and Tessa understood that they were connected somehow. There was unspoken friendship between them.

They heard Mason's father tromp around above them for what seemed like an hour before he gave up and disappeared. Nolan loosened his grip on Tessa, and she tended his wound once more. Tessa's blouse was saturated with blood. She opened her phone to see his face. He was pale as the moon.

"Now, you just hang on a little longer, and we'll get you all fixed up. Help will be coming," Tessa said as she wiped a tear off her cheek. Nolan smiled at her.

"You are a very brave young lady. I am so proud that you are my guardian angel. Please, I must ask you one more favor, my angel." Nolan spoke so softly and genuinely that she could not hold her tears back.

"My love, Lillian Odessa Taylor, will wonder where I am. Please tell her that I loved her until the end, and I love her forever after. I have not left her with nothing. I leave my gold to her. Do you have something I could write that on, my angel?"

"I think it's best if we write it on something of yours."

"If you would please, my family Bible is in my back pocket. Please write for me." Tessa scrambled through her pockets for a pen or pencil. She found a pencil wrapped in her hair just as Nolan began.



"I, Nolan O'Macy, give my plots of land and gold findings to Miss Lillian Odessa Taylor and all her descendents. I have loved her with my whole heart and soul, forsaking all others for eternity. I am sorry that I could not give her more. I wish I could have married her and given her children and grown old together. I pray for forgiveness for the death of my brother, Cian. I pray that my mother and my family in Ireland have long, happy lives. I ask that God forgive Mick and Cassius for their wrongdoings. I thank Him for my blessed life." He signed the note in his Bible. Tessa cried and cried.

"Don't cry, my angel. We all die sometime. I am thankful that you are here, and I am not going to Heaven all alone." Tessa curled up in Nolan's arm again and cried into his shoulder. "I am so proud of you. Be my strong, brave girl. Tell my Lilly that I love her and that she was the center of my thoughts."

## CHAPTER 11

Tessa awoke to the sounds of a search party calling her name. Her eyes slowly opened as the night's events came back to her. *Nolan*. She panicked. Tessa used the light from her phone and the sunbeams that ventured down the long tunnel to search for him.

Just dirt. But then, out of the floor of the hole, she saw a shoelace. *He's here. He was here*. Using her bare hands, she dug into the dirt, pulling up Nolan's bony hand, the Bible still in his gasp. She tucked the Bible into the back of her pants, concealing it.

Tessa said a prayer for him in her mind, asking God to let his soul into Heaven. She said a quick goodbye to Nolan and shouted for the search party.

"Down here! Down here! I'm down here!" Movement rushed around above, resulting in a few friendly and worried faces popping over the opening.

"Tessa! She's over here! She's down this one!" the small group yelled back to what Tessa imagined was a larger party across the mining field. They sent down a rope and guided Tessa out of the hole.

At the rescue party's rendezvous site, the police anxiously questioned Tessa in order to complete their report and finish the day's work. They were shocked to hear her story about Mason's father, a certain Mike Malley, attempting to hit Tessa with a shovel after multiple threats during the weeks prior, then chasing her into the mine fields in the dark, knowing the danger. Remembering the laws that Mason had mentioned in the "Welcome Stranger" story about ownership of gold based on where it's discovered, Tessa chose not to tell the police about Mike's search for Nolan's gold. Nolan wanted that gold to go to Lilly and her family. Tessa was determined to see that through. Neither the government nor Mike Malley would see that gold, at least not in their own pocket.

Once the police had the information they needed, Mom smothered Tessa in hugs and kisses and don't-you-ever-scare-me-like-that-again's. Tessa was happy to see her mother again, but her thoughts wandered back into the mining hole she had shared with Nolan and the visions she had shared with Lilly.

Ben weaved his way through the crowd in order to find his sister. He was often put on the back burner of Tessa's priorities, but nonetheless, he had missed her and was worried about her safety. Just as he approached his sister with open arms, ready for a hug, she darted in the opposite direction and weaved her own path out of the crime scene.

"Tessy! Tessy, wait!" Ben cried out. Tessa turned around to face him, but still hurried along her path.

"Ben, I have to go, I just have to go—," she replied as she bumped into Mason. She turned to face him, thoughts of Ben completely gone from her mind.

Silence endured for what seemed like hours before Tessa initiated conversation.

"I... am... so sorry, Mason. I don't know what to say," Tessa began.



"It's not your fault. I'm so embarrassed. I have no idea why he would try to hurt you like that. I should be the one that is sorry. Sorry I have a father like him. Guess my mum was smart to leave him. They are putting him away until the trial. Since I'm 18, I don't need a guardian. It'll be just me, all alone in the house. Maybe, if you can ever forgive me, you could come visit?"

Tessa fell into his arms. "I would love to visit you! I know that your dad's behavior has nothing to do with you. It's not your fault either. But I have to go. I will call you later!" she called out as she ran towards town.

## CHAPTER 12

After asking a little old man at the local music store for directions, she found the public library. The lady at the front desk was more than happy to point Tessa towards the special section on the town's history. A little table and set of chairs sat in the middle of the nook. Three bookshelves stocked with literature from the time and personal accounts of the gold mining era flanked three sides of the table and chairs, making it very cozy and private in the nook. The librarian boasted about their large collection of newspaper clippings, including some from Bendigo and the surrounding smaller towns. She showed Tessa how to use the light scroll machine to view the newspapers. An index of the articles was located next to the machine.

Tessa scoured the index for Cassius Taylor or a Cooper mine. She had no idea what year Lilly came to Australia, which made searching through hundreds of articles even harder. The mine had been built and enough time had passed for the owner, Cooper, to take on a partner, so Tessa decided the 1860's would be a good place to start, ten years after the gold rush began.

Finally, twenty-five minutes later, in 1874, Tessa found an article announcing Cooper taking on a partner in his mine.

"COOPER MINE TAKING PARTNER, CASSIUS TAYLOR- The Cooper Mine has been down in production due to the miners asking for more money. The miners have had several failed attempts at forming a union because Cooper met any demands immediately. Because of this, Cooper has taken on a partner to help with the financial problems. The new partner, Cassius Taylor, is a wealthy business man from London. His current business in textiles will be run by his manager. He plans for his daughter to join him in Australia within the next year. In celebration and in hopes of winning over the miners, Taylor has given the miners every other Sunday off. The miners are happy with the new arrangement and have no plans for making more demands or creating a union. Castlemaine, 1874."

*Cassius bought into the mine to help save Cooper? But Cassius wanted Lilly to marry Cooper because he had no money. Maybe Cassius just pretended to have money so that Lilly could marry Cooper in hopes that the mining business would take off. Something else must have been going on. Maybe Cassius was in trouble in England and needed to get out of the country and start somewhere new. Maybe he just had gold fever like everyone else. Or, he could have been tricked into the situation!* Tessa printed a copy of the article. She would bring all her findings home and ask Lilly about them.

Tessa closely scanned through the articles of 1874 and 1875. Apparently, the mine had struck gold and was able to hire more miners for lower cost. Even if Cassius was tricked into the partnership, he would certainly not mind with the huge profit they were making. Tessa was overjoyed at her findings. She read along with a smile on her face until she found the next article.

"COOPER WEDDING TO TAYLOR, PARTNER'S DAUGHTER."

Tessa's heart sank into the pit of her stomach. How could Lilly marry Cooper? Nolan had died, thinking of her and loving her, but she had gone and married Cooper. Tessa was furious with Lilly. She copied the



article and put it behind the stack of her other findings. Angry as she was, Tessa still made a promise to Nolan. She would find Lilly's descendants and make sure they had the gold.

Finding Lilly in the census was much easier than in the newspaper articles now that she knew the year to look for. A census had been taken in 1880. She found Lilly's entry.

Lillian Odessa Taylor Cooper, age 22, date of birth November 12, 1857, homeland London, England.

Noelle Macy Cooper, age 4, date of birth February 17, 1876, homeland Castlemaine, Victoria.

Lilly had a daughter. Tessa flipped through to the next set of census entries. Lilly and Noelle were listed, but there were no other descendants. She continued to the third set of entries. She still found only Lilly and Noelle. Lilly must have had only one child.

Carrying her articles and census entries, Tessa felt even more confused than before. She had answered the question of Nolan's disappearance, but opened a can of worms in the library that afternoon. She longed to know the entire story.

.....

Once she was home, Tessa brought out her mirror and sat on her bed in the same way that she had during her visions. She looked into the mirror and waited for Lilly to appear. As she materialized, Tessa started in with the questions.

"Lilly! How could you marry Cooper? I found these articles and... I just can't believe it. You and Nolan were so in love. What happened?" Tessa begged. Lilly motioned for Tessa to touch the mirror's surface. Tessa moved her hand towards it, but hesitated. "I have to tell you something first."

Tessa began her tale with her drive to Mason's and ended with Mike's imprisonment. Lilly looked astounded, but still longed to answer Tessa's first questions. She motioned again for Tessa to touch the mirror. As soon as the tip of her finger touched the surface, she was sucked into another vision.

The setting of the familiar waterfall surrounded her. It was dark, but the moon was out. Tessa found Lilly lying in Nolan's arms, just a few feet away from the water's edge under a tree. Its branches drooped around the couple, hiding them like nature's curtains.

Lilly and Nolan were kissing passionately, and Tessa could feel the heat. Things were escalating faster than usual. Nolan reached for Lilly's breast, and Lilly hesitated.

"What's wrong, my love?" he asked her.

"I just want to remember this moment. I wish we were married, Nolan. But I doubt our wedding night would be in a place this beautiful," Lilly whispered to him, trying to keep them both in the romantic mood.

"I will wait to marry you if that's what you want," he offered.

"What's being married besides promising to love each other forever in front of God?"

"I love you, Lillian Odessa Taylor. I love you forever, and I love no one else."

"I love you, Nolan O'Macy. I will love you forever, and I will love no one else," she promised in reply.

She smiled at Nolan. He brushed her hair off her face and paused to look into her eyes. He kissed her with gentle force. She wrapped her leg around his waist, and with that, the scene changed.

.....

Lilly stood in the middle of a small garden on the side of a white house. With one hand bracing her on the house, she bent over and held her stomach with the other. She threw up violently for a few minutes, but finally the vomit subsided and she was able to stand. She wiped the corners of her mouth and waited for the color to come back to her face. After she had composed herself, she slowly walked around the corner of the house and back to the front porch where her father was sitting.

"You disappear at all hours. Now you are sick. It has to stop, Lilly. You are shaming this family and ruining our chances. Thankfully, Cooper has yet to catch on and enjoys your free spirit," he spoke to her without having the courtesy to even turn his head to look at her.

She said nothing in reply as she sat back down in the chair next to her father.

"It's beautiful down here. I love the scenery. Shall I get you more lemonade, Father?"

"Will you ever listen? Your mother was exactly the same."

"Then how ever did you manage to tolerate her?"

"I loved her." He paused and turned to look at his daughter. Mentioning the late Mrs. Taylor had softened his hard-shelled heart. "I love you, too. You remind me of her every day. You received so much more of her spirit than mine. Your marriage to Mr. Cooper is not a punishment, Lilly. It's a gift that will help you and your family. I will not see what is left of my family destroyed."

Tessa, still not used to phasing into and out of visions, fell backward onto her bed. The mirror fell out of her hand and broke on the floor in her room. From the millions of tiny pieces of glass, smoke swirled and grew into a cloud that stood nearly six feet tall. Tessa rolled off the edge of the bed and hid on the side opposite the smoke cloud. She peeked over her yellow covers, now in a frumpled mess, to watch the cloud. The swirling sped up, and Tessa feared that her entire room and possibly the house could be destroyed. The smoke cloud started to separate the individual colors out of the original grey, and limbs formed from the original mass. It looked like a person. Seconds later, the swirling stopped, and Lilly sat at Tessa's vanity table.

"How could I have been so stupid and blind?" Lilly cried. She buried her face in her hands.



"How are you here? I have only been able to see you in mirrors. How can you speak?" Tessa asked astounded.

The sobbing subsided, and Lilly looked up from her hands. Tears still ran down her cheeks. "I think that my soul has been trapped in my mirror all this time. When you broke it, I believe my soul is now free to roam this realm and speak freely. I do thank you for that. Please do not think that I am at all ungrateful for your help. I just wish Nolan knew how much I loved him. That I love him still. I was pregnant with Nolan's daughter when he went missing. I had to marry Cooper. I was beginning to show. I told him that Noelle was premature, although my father and I both knew the truth. I never broke my promise to Nolan. I always loved him and no one else. Cooper was very kind to Noelle, however. I think Nolan would have been pleased that she was in good hands. As for my father, I did not know that he was responsible for Nolan's death. I think that Father had good intentions, but I can never forgive him for what he did. Nolan may be able to, but he was always stronger than I. Thank you for being there with him when he died. I am so glad that he was not alone. You are such a brave girl."

Tessa stopped to look at Lilly. She sat there, just as normal as the next person, in a long, full, cream-colored gown, accented with lace at the collar and sleeves. Not one dark brown hair was out of place. *She really is pure beauty. I wish someday I could be like her.*

"I want to finish this. I want you to be able to pass on, to go to Heaven. I swear that I will lay Nolan to rest next to you, where he belongs."

"Thank you, my sweet girl. Thank you," Lilly said with genuine gratitude.

## CHAPTER 13

"Mason? It's Tessa. I know that you've been through a lot this week, but there's something I need to ask you. Could you do me a favor?"

"Sure, what's up?"

"Mason, I know this sounds crazy, but I've been seeing ghosts. This miner, Nolan, and this pretty young woman, Lilly, were in love, but then he was murdered! And Lilly can't pass on to Heaven until Nolan is put to rest, so I need your help to dig up his bones and bury them next to her in the cemetery." Tessa spoke so quickly that she thought Mason might have missed something or not understood her at all or thought she had lost her mind altogether. There was an awkwardly long silence on the line.

"Please don't think I'm crazy. I just need help. I can't do this alone anymore. You were talking about ghosts the other day so I thought, maybe--"

"Sure, I'll help you," he agreed and laughed at her little rant, "and I don't think you are crazy. Well, at least not for seeing ghosts! People see them all the time, like I said. When and where do you want to meet?"

"I'm in your driveway," Tessa admitted.

Mason laughed. "Why didn't you just come in and ask?"

"I thought if you thought I was crazy, I could just leave, but if you believed me and wanted to help, then I didn't waste time driving over." By the time she had explained, Mason had met her at the door. They both hung up their cell phones.

"I suppose we'll need supplies then, babe?" he said as he opened the door for her.

"Thank you so mu—" Tessa began, but Mason's sweet lips stopped the rest of the words from coming out with a kiss. At first, Tessa's surprised expression made the kiss rigid, but she relaxed and soon their lips fit like a favorite pair of shoes: comfortable and broken-in in all the right places, as if they'd be kissing their whole lives. After a few seconds, she remembered the purpose of her visit and broke away.

She finished her thought with Mason's lips still imprinted on hers. "Thank you so much...for helping me, that is."

"Let's get started. Where are we going?"

"Down a mining hole. We'll need flashlights, a wooden or metal box, rope, and shovels. Nolan is down the same hole that they found me the night. . .the night I fell in."

"You can say it. The night my dad tried to hurt you." Tessa frowned. She did not want to cause Mason any grief. She knew that Mason must be feeling a jumble of conflicting emotions. His own father had tried to hurt or even kill his new girlfriend (or at least she hoped she was his girlfriend), resulting in



imprisonment and abandonment. On top of that, Mason was kind enough to help her, after she and her family had pressed charges.

"Do you have the supplies we need?"

"I should have them in the barn. I'll grab them, and then you lead the way."

.....

"This is the one. If you could lower me into the hole, then send down the box, I can put Nolan's remains inside."

Mason made a series of knots and reached around Tessa's waist and between her legs to form a harness. Tessa blushed. She felt guilty about enjoying her own romance while standing over Nolan, whose romance had been abruptly ended.

Tessa stood backwards at the ledge of the hole, ready to start down the tunnel, this time of her own accord. Mason braced himself against gum tree roots about ten feet away.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Ready."

She slowly walked down the side of the tunnel. About halfway down, she called up for Mason to stop, so she could turn the flashlight on. Only ten short steps and a little jump landed her on the floor of the mine.

"I'm down! I'm going to start digging. This shouldn't take too long," she called up to Mason. He tied the rope off on the tree roots and moved to the ledge so they could chat while she worked.

"I'm a bit jealous. I have to admit," he called down to her.

"Why is that?"

"Well, you've been here only a few weeks and already seen ghosts. I've been here my whole life and never seen one! Do they talk to you too? How do you see them?"

"I don't really see Nolan, I just see Lilly. I see her in mirrors. It started just seeing her looking back at me, but then, when I touched the mirrors, I got sucked into these visions. Like Lilly was showing me parts of her memory. It kinda feels like you are invisible eyes watching a movie from the inside. But then when you get sucked out of the vision, it feels like a tornado. I'm really dizzy afterwards."

"So they don't talk to you?"

"Not really. Nolan did when I was down here. But that wasn't a vision. It was more of a time continuum thing. So I zapped from our time, back to his time, then back to our time. I'm really glad you aren't judging me. I know this all sounds crazy."

"Like I said, I'm just jealous! I wish I was that lucky. What did you and Nolan talk about?"

"He told me about Lilly and how much he loved her. It was very sweet. I also found out about his murderers. It was his best friend and Lilly's father! Can you believe that? How could someone, who seems to care about you and travels to another country with you and grows up down the street, kill his best friend? And how could a father, who loves his daughter, kill the man that she loves? Now she was supposed to marry his business partner, but she loved Nolan instead. I guess he was just selfish."

"Did he say anything about the gold?"

Tessa paused. *How could Mason know that Nolan had discovered gold? I have never brought that up. His father had asked her the same thing the night he chased her into the hole.* She decided to play dumb.

"Gold? No, he didn't mention any gold. He just talked about Lilly and how much he loved her. I guess he didn't want to talk about work while he bled to death. Geez, Mason."

"You almost done?"

"Yes, sir. I'll just close up the box, and you can pull me on up."

The walk up felt good, knowing that she had control over when she could leave the tiny tunnel this time.

"So, where to now?" Mason asked her.

"I guess to the cemetery. Not the Pennyweight, but the regular one."

The drive out to the cemetery was quiet. Mason held Tessa's hand during the whole drive. Tessa played along, but no longer felt comfortable confiding in Mason. She knew that he was connected to this mystery more intimately than she had realized. But, she had never felt this strongly about a boy before and hoped that her first instincts would win against her new doubt in the end.

Tessa overdramatized her grief on the walk through the cemetery. She felt like this would prevent Mason from trying to start up a conversation. The cemetery started with the oldest graves on the west side, so they parked there and weaved through the rows looking for Lillian Odessa Taylor Cooper. She lay next to her husband and daughter.

It was a strange feeling to be looking at the grave of a person you had just spoken to hours before and knew you would speak to again very soon. Her body was down there, probably just bones and dust, like Nolan's in the box in her hands.

Mason started digging next to the gravestone. Tessa slowly kneeled to the ground and reflected on the heaviness on her heart. Even though Lilly and Nolan had lived over one hundred years ago, they still loved each other and had daily struggles and had jobs and families. They were not that different from



Tessa, although she had lived in a different country with a different culture and in a different time. They were just regular people. They've been waiting for each other in the afterlife. They honored their promise and love enough to wait for each other in the afterlife. Tessa's thoughts suddenly halted. *The afterlife*. Throughout her entire experience with the ghosts, she had never stopped to realize that this proved there is an afterlife. That means that Nana is in Heaven. She is happy and watching over Tessa, protecting her through her adventures in the outback. Tessa reexamined her heart to find that all the missing parts had been filled and healed. Besides helping two star-crossed lovers meet again in Heaven, she confidently knew that her Nana was at peace as well.

"Tessa? It's time."

Tessa gently placed the box in the dirt and covered it with dirt. Mason helped her up and gave her a hug. She genuinely hugged him back. *Maybe he really does just want to help. Maybe the gold question was just innocent. How could someone that does so many nice things be bad?*

## CHAPTER 14

Tessa found Mason suffocating the next week at school. He walked her to all her classes, kissed her on the cheek before they parted, invited her over for dinner and movies each night, and even texted her during class. The old Tessa would have loved the attention from such a handsome, charming boy, but the new Tessa felt a need to be independent. She solved ghost mysteries; she didn't need a smothering boyfriend. She planned to find the gold and give it to its rightful owner that weekend. She lied to Mason and told him that she was sick and didn't feel like getting together.

She found an old pick, shovel and flashlight in the guest room that Mom had filled with junk. She put on an old t-shirt and started to the mine where Nolan had actually found the gold.

Tessa crawled through the same narrow opening that Nolan and Cian had crawled through. *I must be the first person to crawl through here in over a hundred years.* The adrenaline rocketed through her veins.

The room inside was much larger than Tessa had expected, but she figured that water and erosion could have created a much larger space in that amount of time. She could stand comfortably and walk about the space with no problem.

She scanned the area for the cave-in that had killed Cian and Nolan and found the quartz and gold under. A pile of rocks was stacked to the furthest side from the opening. She started to dig. Only one small scoop revealed Nolan's gold.

"So he did tell you about the gold."

Tessa gasped and turned around to see Mason inside the mine.

"You followed me."

"I went to your house to bring you soup, but your brother said you had left. I drove out of town, spotted your car, and followed you."

"Why are you here?"

"Remember that night at my house, when you asked about the map hanging above the fireplace? Well, that map marks all the ground that my family has covered searching for the gold that you just dug up."

Tessa looked confused and astounded.

"So, you knew? You knew about Nolan and Lilly the whole time?"

"Of course, I knew. Cassius Taylor paid Mick Malley to kill Nolan in 1874. Mick thought he would buy Nolan's property and claim the gold for himself. After all, Cassius had no idea about the gold. But Nolan had led him to the wrong location. That sneaky bastard didn't trust his best friend, which I guess he had good reason not to in hind's sight. Mick killed him before learning the true location of the gold. Since



then, his family –my family- has been digging up the whole area looking for it. All that stuff in our living room? That's stuff we've found while looking for this gold. Just junk compared to this."

"How did you know they were ghosts? And how did you know that I would see them?"

"Lilly's ghost has been begging your family to help her for years. She lurks about jumping from mirror to mirror and dropping hints about her past. Your great-grandmother was the last one to get close. She saw a few memories, but never actually spoke to Lilly or especially Nolan. Your grandmother was too afraid and ran off to America. The "connects" were forgotten after a few generations, so it was easy enough to extract information by just befriending the women in your family. It always seems to be women, too. Doesn't your kind ever have boys?"

"This gold does not belong to you. It belongs to Lilly."

"Lilly is dead. Nolan is dead. My family has been searching for this for years. We've lost our lives looking for it. My father is in jail because of this. Tessa, I really like you and I've never felt this way about a girl before, but I can't let over a hundred years of work and sacrifice go to waste." Mason pulled a knife from his pocket. "I'm sorry, Tessa."

Tessa ran at him and ducked just before making contact. Mason was knocked onto his back and the knife knocked from his hand. He grabbed her shoulders and rolled on top of her so that she lay helpless on her back. He started to choke her.

She reached for a rock, barely managing to grasp it from her lack of breath. Just before Mason choked the last breath out of her lungs, she hit his temple with all her strength and stood up. He grabbed her hand, trying to pull her back to the ground. Her hands were sweaty and slipped away. He stood up and lunged toward her, knocking her into the delicate wall of the mine.

The both stopped when they heard sirens. Mason was distracted, so Tessa kicked him as hard as she could in the shins and pushed him into the wall, which began to collapse from the pressure.

She crawled out through the tunnel. The gold in that mine had taken so much life and caused so much pain. Was it even worth it?

The police arrived in full force. Two officers, armed, poured out from each of the three police cars. They stood ready for anything behind their open doors, guns pointed at the dust caused by the cave-in coming out of the crevice.

"COME OUT WITH YOUR HANDS WHERE WE CAN SEE THEM!"

Tessa, shuffling her exhausted and bruised body, slowly emerged from the cloud of dust.

An officer hurried to help her. She collapsed in his arms.

She regained consciousness after several minutes in the back of a police car.

"She's awake! She's awake!" her brother cried out.

"Benny?"

"Tessy! I'm so sorry, but I followed you,' cause I knew something was funny when Mason came over but you weren't home, and I was worried about you. Don't be mad, please!"

"Oh Ben, I'm not mad. I'm so glad you did that. I love you." Ben looked so proud. His sister, that he looked up to and admired, not only had acknowledged his good deed, but said that she loved him.

"Little mate, we need to talk to your sister for a few minutes. Could you step outside? Your mum is on her way. She'll be wanting to hear the story from the hero himself." Ben hopped out of the car.

"Well, Miss Tessa Wilson, we meet again. What happened?"

"Officer, this will sound crazy, but I found a Bible with a will in it the night that I fell into that mining hole. It gave the location of this mine and the family that is supposed to inherit it. I just wanted to make sure that they got it. I think it's the right thing to do. But Mason Malley, pretending to be my boyfriend, followed me and tried to kill me with a knife. Then I fought back, which caused a cave-in. He's still in there. He says his family has been looking for this mine for years. I think that's why his father tried to hurt me in the first place. They want what is in that mine."

"May I see the Bible?"

"Sure. It's at my house. Sir, I think it's important that the family get the mine and whatever is inside. It was the man's dying wish."

"I understand. Actually, it makes sense that the Malleys would be after gold. They are notorious detectors. They are out nearly every weekend and even some weeknights. Just to put your mind at ease, no Malley will be causing you any trouble. Mason is being taken to the prison and will await trial once we dig him out. You really owe a lot to your brother. He worried enough to follow you and call the police. He's a brave little mate."

Tessa smiled. "I know. Thank you."

"We can pick up the Bible when we drop you off at your house. We will trace the family lineage and find the rightful person to inherit the mine. In the meantime, I strongly suggest you seek medical attention. You could have internal bleeding."

"I'm sure my mom will send me straight the hospital. Thank you, officer."



## CHAPTER 15

Tessa fell into a deep sleep when she finally made it home from the hospital. Mom had sworn to never let her out of her sight ever again, and Ben was praised as the hero of the century. It felt so good to finally be safe and to have solved the mystery of Nolan and Lilly's story that Tessa passed out when her face hit the pillow.

Her dreams were not penetrated by Lilly's visions. Instead, she dreamed of nothing. Finally, Tessa was at peace. She had come to terms with Nana's death and put Nolan and Lilly to rest. A small subtle light coming from her vanity table woke her up from this peaceful sleep. Lilly sat on the chair that she had just the night before. She said nothing. She merely motioned for Tessa to pick up the mirror one last time.

Tessa, tired and not fully alert, slid to the edge of the bed and picked up a mirror. She was confused because the mirror had shattered earlier and now lay unharmed on the vanity.

"Thank you for bringing my Nolan back to me. There is only one way I know to thank you. Please look in the mirror. Just one last time," Lilly whispered to her. *"What do you see?"* She appeared with a subtle glow, Tessa noticed as she became more awake and aware. *She must be about to ascend to Heaven. She looks so happy.*

Tessa brought the mirror to her face and saw Lilly looking back at her. She looked at the vanity and saw that Lilly was gone, only to be found in the mirror.

Lilly matched her eyes with Tessa's and smiled. Her face slowly faded away, her eyes the last to disappear. As Lilly's face revealed more of Tessa's, the last piece of the puzzle started to fit into place. The final question was being answered.

*I look just like her. We have the same eyes. We have Nana's eyes. Wait. Could it actually be possible? Am I Lilly's great-great-granddaughter?*

Tessa heard the phone ring in Mom's room, followed by sleepy mumbling, then a scream of excitement. She could feel the house shake as Mom ran into her room.

"TESSA, BENNY, WAKE UP! YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE THIS!"

"We inherited the gold. Didn't we? We're Lilly's descendents."

"How did you know that, Tessa? Yes! You are completely right! We have just been given enough gold and money to not work for the rest of our lives, and your children's lives and your grandchildren's lives! What a blessing! But how did you know, Tessa? Did they tell you at the scene?"

"No, Mom. Lilly told me."